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“Ask Mamma”



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“ASK

MAMMA”

OR THE

Richest Commoner in England

Illustrated

With 13 Hand-Coloured Engravings

and many Woodcuts by

JOHN LEECH

VOLUME II

London

Bradbury, Agnew, & Co. Ltd., Bouvierie Street

ASK MARY,

or

THE RICHEST COMMONER

IN
ENGLAND

By The Author of
"Handley Cross" "Sponge's
Sporting Tour" &c, &c,



with illustrations
by John Leech

SWAIN, SC

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CHAPTER XLVIII.

CUDDY FLINTOFF AND CO.



“H, my dear Pringle!” exclaimed Sir Moses, rising from the depths of a rather inadequately stuffed chair (for Mrs. Margerum had been at it). “Ah, my dear Pringle, I’m delighted to see you!” continued the Baronet, getting Billy by both hands, as the noiseless Mr. Bankhead, having opened the library door, piloted him through the intricacies of the company. Our host really was glad of a new arrival, for a long winter’s evening had exhausted the gossip of parties who in a general way saw quite enough, if not too much, of each other. And this is the worst of country visiting in winter; people are so long together that they get exhausted before they should begin.

They have let off the steam of their small talk, and have nothing left to fall back upon but repetition. One man has told what there is in the “Post,” another in “Punch,” a third in the “Mark Lane Express,” and then they are about high-and-dry for the rest of the evening. From criticising Billy, they had taken to speculating upon whether he would come or not, the odds—without which an Englishman can do nothing—being rather in favour of Mrs. Yammerton’s detaining him. It was not known that Monsieur Rougier had arrived. The mighty problem was at length solved by the Richest Commoner in England appearing among them, and making the usual gyrations peculiar to an introduction. He was then at liberty for ever after to nod or speak or shake

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hands with or bow to Mr. George and Mr. Henry Waggett, of Kitteridge Green, both five-and-twenty pound subscribers to the Hit-im-and-Hold-im-shire hounds, to Mr. Stephen Booty, of Verbena Lodge, who gave ten pounds and a cover, to Mr. Silverthorn, of Dryfield, who didn't give anything, but who had two very good covers which he had been hinting he should require to be paid for—a hint that had procured him the present invitation, to Mr. Strongstubble, of Buckup Hill, and Mr. Tupman, of Cowslip Cottage, both very good friends to the sport but not “hand-in-the-pocket-ites,” to Mr. Tom Dribbler, Jun., of Hardacres, and his friend Captain Hurricane, of Her Majesty's ship Thunderer, and to Mr. Cuthbert Flintoff, commonly called Cuddy Flintoff, an “all about” sportsman, who professed to be of all hunts but blindly went to none. Cuddy's sporting was in the past tense, indeed he seemed to exist altogether upon the recollections of the chase, which must have made a lively impression upon him, for he was continually interlarding his conversation with view holloas, yoicks wind 'ims! yoicks 'push 'im ups! Indeed, in walking about he seemed to help himself along with the aid of for-rards on! for-rards on! so that a person out of sight, but within hearing, would think he was hunting a pack of hounds.

He dressed the sportsman, too, most assiduously, bird's-eye cravats, step-collared striped vests, green or Oxford-grey cut-aways, with the neatest fitting trowsers on the best bow-legs that ever were seen. To see him at Tattersall's sucking his cane, his cheesy hat well down on his nose, with his stout, well-cleaned doeskin gloves, standing criticising each horse, a stranger would suppose that he lived entirely in the saddle, instead of scarcely ever being in one. On the present occasion, as soon as he got his “bob” made to our Billy, and our hero's back was restored to tranquillity, he at him about the weather —how the moon looked, whether there were any symptoms of frost, and altogether seemed desperately anxious about the atmosphere. This inquiry giving the conversation a start in the out-of-doors line, was quickly followed by Sir Moses asking our Billy how he left the Major, how he found his way there,

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with hopes that everything was comfortable, and oh, agonising promise! that he would do his best to show him sport.

The assembled guests then took up the subject of their “magnificent country” generally, one man lauding its bottomless brooks, another its enormous bullfinches, a third its terrific stone walls, a fourth its stupendous on-and-offs, a fifth its flying foxes, and they unanimously resolved that the man who could ride over Hit-im-and-Hold-im-shire could ride over any country in the world. “*Any country in the world!*” vociferated Cuddy, slowly and deliberately, with a hearty crack of his fat thigh. And Billy, as he sat listening to their dreadful recitals, thought that he *had* got into the lion’s den with a vengeance. Most sincerely he wished himself back at the peaceful pursuits of Yammerton Grange. Then, as they were in full cry with their boasting eulogiums, the joyful dressing-bell rang, and Cuddy Flintoff putting his finger in his ear, as if to avoid deafening himself, shrieked, “*Hoick halloo! hoick!*” in a tone that almost drowned the sound of the clapper. Then when the “ticket-of-leaver” and the *delirium tremens* footman appeared at the door with the blaze of bedroom candles, Cuddy suddenly turned whipper-in, and working his right arm as if he were cracking a whip, kept holloaing, “*Get away hoick! get away hoick!*” until he drove Billy and Baronet and all before him.

* * * * *

“Rum fellow that,” observed the Baronet, now showing Billy up to his room, as soon as he had got sufficient space put between them to prevent Cuddy hearing. “Rum fellow that,” repeated he, not getting a reply from our friend, who didn’t know exactly how to interpret the word “rum.”

“That fellow’s up to everything—cleverest fellow under the sun,” continued Sir Moses, now throwing open the door of an evident bachelor’s bedroom. Not but that it was one of the best in the house, only it was wretchedly furnished, and wanted all the little neatnesses and knick-knackeries peculiar to a lady-kept house. The towels were few and flimsy, the soap hard and dry, there was a pincushion without pins, a portfolio without paper,

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a grate with a smoky fire, while the feather-bed and mattress had been ruthlessly despoiled of their contents. Even the imitation maple-wood sofa on which Billy's dress-clothes were now laid, had not been overlooked, and was as lank and as bare as a third-rate Margate lodging-house one—all ribs and hollows.

“Ah, there you are!” exclaimed Sir Moses, pointing to the garments, “there you are!” adding, “You’ll find the bell at the back of your bed,” pointing to one of the old smothering order of four-posters with its dyed moreen curtains closely drawn, “You’ll find the bell at the back of the bed, and when you come down we shall be in the same room as we were before.” So saying, the Baronet retired, leaving our Billy to commence operations.

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CHAPTER XLIX.

SIR MOSES' SPREAD.



E daresay it has struck such of our readers as have followed the chase for more than the usual average allowance of three seasons, that hunts flourish most vigorously where there is a fair share of hospitality, and Sir Moses Mainchance was quite of that opinion. He found it answered a very good purpose as well to give occasional dinners at home as to attend the club meetings at Hinton. To the former he invited all the *élite* of his field, and such people as he was likely to get anything out of, while the latter included the farmers and yeomen, the Flying Hatters, the Dampers, and so on, whereby, or by reason or means whereof, as the lawyers say, the spirit of the thing was well sustained. His home parties were always a great source of annoyance to our friend Mrs. Margerum, who did not like to be intruded upon by the job cook (Mrs. Pomfret, of Hinton), Mrs. Margerum being in fact more of a housekeeper than a cook, though quite cook enough for Sir Moses in a general way, and perhaps rather too much of a housekeeper for him—had he but known it. Mrs. Pomfret, however, being mistress of Mrs. Margerum's secret (viz., who got the dripping), the latter was obliged to "put up" with her, and take her revenge by hiding her things, and locking up whatever she was likely to want. Still, despite of all difficulties, Mrs. Pomfret, when sober, could cook a very good dinner, and as Sir Moses allowed her a pint of rum for supper, she had no great temptation to exceed till then. She was thought on

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this occasion, if possible, to surpass herself, and certainly Sir Moses' dinner contrasted very favourably with what Billy Pringle had been partaking of at our friend Major Yammerton's, whose cook had more energy than execution. In addition to this, Mr. Bankhead plied the fluids most liberally, as the feast progressed, so that what with invitations to drink, and the regular course of the tide, the party were very happy and hilarious.

Then, after dinner, the hot chestnuts and filberts and anchovy toasts, mingling with an otherwise excellent dessert, flavoured the wine and brought out no end of "yoicks wind 'ims" and aspirations for the morrow. They all felt as if they could ride—Billy and all!

"Not any more, thank you," being at length the order of the day, a move was made back to the library, a drawing-room being a superfluous luxury where there is no lady, and tea and coffee were rang for. A new subject of conversation was wanted, and Monsieur presently supplied the deficiency.

"That's a Frenchman, that servant of yours, isn't he, Pringle?" asked Sir Moses, when Monsieur retired with the tray.

"Yarse," replied Billy, feeling his trifling moustache after its dip in the cup.

"Thought so," rejoined Sir Moses, who prided himself upon his penetration. "I'll have a word with him when he comes in again," continued he.

Tea followed quickly on the heels of coffee, Monsieur coming in after Bankhead. Monsieur now consequentially drunk, and dressed much in the manner that he is in the picture of the glove scene at Yammerton Grange.

"*Ah, Monsieur! comment vous portez-vous?*" exclaimed the Baronet, which was about as much French as he could raise.

"Pretty middlin', tenk you, sare," replied Jack, bowing and grinning at the compliment.

"What, you speak English, do you?" asked the Baronet, thinking he might as well change the language.

"I spake it, sare, some small matter, sare," replied Jack,

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with a shrug of his shoulders—"Not nothing like my modder's tongue, you knows."

"Ah! you speak it dom'd well," replied Sir Moses. "Let you and I have a talk together. Tell me, now, were you ever out hunting?"

Jean Rougier.—"Oh, yes, sare, I have been at the chasse of de small dicky-bird—tom-tit—cock-robin—vot you call."

Sir Moses (laughing).—"No, no, that is not the sort of chase I mean. I mean, have you ever been out fox-hunting?"

Jean Rougier (confidentially).—"Nevare, sare—nevare."

Sir Moses.—"Ah, my friend, then you've a great pleasure to come to—a great pleasure to come to, indeed. Well, you're a dom'd good feller, and I'll tell you what I'll do—I'll tell you what I'll do—I'll mount you to-morrow—dom'd if I won't—you shall ride my old horse, Cockatoo—carry you beautifully. What d'ye ride? Thirteen stun, I should say," looking Jack over, "quite up to that—quite up to that—stun above it, for that matter. You'll go streaming away like a bushel of beans."

"Oh, sare, I tenk you, sare," replied Jack, "but I have not got my hunting apparatus—my mosquet—my gun, my—no, not notin at all."

"Gun!" exclaimed Sir Moses, amidst the laughter of the company. "Why, you wouldn't shoot the fox, would ye?"

"*Certainement*," replied Jack. "I should pop him over."

"Oh, the devil!" exclaimed Sir Moses, throwing up his hands in astonishment. "Why, man, we keep the hounds on purpose to hunt him."

"Silly fellers," replied Jack, "you should pepper his jacket."

"Ah, Monsieur, I see you have a deal to learn," rejoined Sir Moses, laughing. "However, it's never too late to begin—never too late to begin, and you shall take your first lesson to-morrow. I'll mount you on old Cockatoo, and you shall see how we manage these matters in England."

"Oh, sare, I tenk you moch," replied Jack, again excusing himself. "Bot I have not got no breeches, no boot-jacks—no notin, *comme il faut*."

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"I'll lend you everything you want—a boot-jack and all," replied Sir Moses, now quite in the generous mood.

"Ah, sare, you are vare beautiful, and I moch appreciate your benevolence; bot I sud not like to risk my neck and crop outside an unqualified, contradictory quadruped."

"Nothing of the sort!" exclaimed Sir Moses, "nothing of the sort! He's the quietest, gentlest crittur alive—a child might ride him, mightn't it, Cuddy?"

"Safest horse under the sun," replied Cuddy Flintoff, confidently. "Don't know such another. Have nothing to do but sit on his back, and give him his head, and he'll take far better care of you than you can of him. He's the nag to carry you close up to their sterns. *Ho-o-i-ck, forrard, ho-o-i-ck!* Dash my buttons, Monsieur, but I think I see you sailing away. Shouldn't be surprised if you were to bring home the brush, only you've got one under your nose as it is," alluding to his moustache.

Jack at this looked rather sour, for somehow people don't like to be laughed at; so he proceeded to push his tray about under the guests' noses, by way of getting rid of the subject. He had no objection to a hunt, and to try and do what Cuddy Flintoff predicted, only he didn't want to spoil his own clothes, or be made a butt of. So having had his say, he retired as soon as he could, inquiring of Bankhead, when he got out, who that porky old fellow with the round, close-shaven face was.

When the second flight of tea-cups came in, Sir Moses was seated on a hardish chaise longue, beside our friend Mr. Pringle, to whom he was doing the agreeable attentive host, and a little of the inquisitive stranger; trying to find out as well about the Major and his family, as about Billy himself, his friends and belongings. The Baronet had rather cooled on the subject of mounting Monsieur, and thought to pave the way for a back-out.

"That's a stout-built feller of yours," observed he to Billy, kicking up his toe at Jack as he passed before them with the supplementary tray of cakes and cream, and so on.

"Yarse," drawled Billy, wondering what matter it made to Sir Moses.

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"Stouter than I took him for," continued the Baronet, eyeing Jack's broad back and strong undersettings. "That man 'ill ride fourteen stun, I dessay."

Billy had no opinion on the point, so began admiring his pretty foot; comparing it with Sir Moses', which was rather thick and clumsy.

The Baronet conned the matter over in his mind ; the man was heavy ; the promised horse was old and weak ; the country deep, and he didn't know that Monsieur could ride—altogether he thought it wouldn't do. Let his master mount him if he liked, or let him stay at home and help Bankhead with the plate, or Peter with the shoes. So Sir Moses settled it in his own mind, as far as he was concerned, at least, and resumed his inquiries of our Billy. Which of the Miss Yammertons he thought the prettiest, which sang the best, who played the harp, if the Major indulged him with much hare-soup, and then glanced incidentally at his stud, and Bo-Peep.

He then asked him about Lord Ladythorne ; if it was true that Mrs. Moffatt and he quarrelled; if his lordship wasn't getting rather slack ; and whether Billy didn't think Dicky Boggledike an old woman, to which latter interrogatory he replied, "Yarse"—he thought he was, and ought to be drafted.

While the *tête-à-tête* was going on, a desultory conversation ensued among the other guests in various parts of the room, Mr. Booty button-holing Captain Hurricane, to tell him a capital thing out of "Punch," and receiving in return an exclamation of—"Why, man, I told you that myself before dinner." Tom Dribbler going about touching people up in the ribs with his thumb, inquiring with a knowing wink of his eye, or a jerk of his head, "Ay, old feller, how goes it ?" which was about the extent of Tom's conversational powers. Henry Waggett talking "wool" to Mr. Tupman ; while Cuddy Flintoff kept popping out every now and then to look at the moon, returning with a "hoick wind 'im ! ho-ick!" or—

"A southerly wind and a cloudy sky
Proclaimeth a hunting morning."

Very cheering the assurance was to our friend Billy Pringle,
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as the reader may suppose, but he had the sense to keep his feelings to himself.

At length the last act of the entertainment approached, by the door flying open through an invisible agency, and the *delirium tremens* footman appearing with a spacious tray, followed by Bankhead and Monsieur, with "Cardigans" and other the materials of "night-caps," which they placed on the mirth-promoting circle of a round table. All hands drew to it like bluebottle-flies to a sugar-cask, as well to escape from themselves and each other, as to partake of the broiled bones, and other the good things with which the tray was stored.

"Hie, worry! worry! worry!" cried Cuddy Flintoff, darting at the black bottles, for he dearly loved a drink, and presently had a beaker of brandy, so strong that, as Silverthorn said, the spoon almost stood upright in it.

"Let's get chairs!" exclaimed he, turning short round on his heel; "let's get chairs, and be snug; it's as cheap sitting as standing," so saying, he wheeled a smoking-chair up to the table, and was speedily followed by the rest of the party, with various shaped seats. Then such of the guests as wanted to shirk drinking took whiskey or gin, which they could dilute as much as they chose; while those who didn't care for showing their predilection for drink, followed Cuddy's example, and made it as strong as they liked. This is the time that the sot comes out undisguisedly. The form of wine-drinking after dinner is mere child's play in their proceedings: the spirit is what they go for.

At length sots and sober ones were equally helped to their liking; and the approving sips being taken, the other great want of life—tobacco—then became apparent.

"Smoking allowed here," observed Cuddy Flintoff, diving into his side-pocket for a cigar, adding, as he looked at the wretched old red chintz-covered furniture, which not even the friendly light of the *moderateur* lamps could convert into anything respectable: "No fear of doing any harm here, I think?"

So the rest of the company seemed to think, for there was

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presently a great kissing of cigar-ends and rising of clouds, and then the party seemed to be lost in deep reveries. Thus they sat for some minutes, some eyeing their cocked-up toes, some the dirty ceiling, others smoking and nursing their beakers of spirit on their knees.

At length Tom Dribbler gave tongue—“What time will the hounds leave the kennel in the morning, Sir Moses?” asked he.

“Hoick to Dribbler! Hoick!” immediately cheered Cuddy—as if capping the pack to a find.

“Oh, why, let me see,” replied Sir Moses, filliping the ashes off the end of his cigar—“Let me see,” repeated he—“Oh—ah—to-morrow’s Monday; Monday, the Crooked Billet—Crooked Billet—nine miles—eight through Applecross Park; leave here at nine—ten to nine, say—nothing like giving them plenty of time on the road.”

“Nothing,” assented Cuddy Flintoff, taking a deep drain at his glass, adding, as soon as he could get his nose persuaded to come out of it again, “I *do* hate to see men hurrying hounds to cover in a morning.”

“No fear of mine doing that,” observed Sir Moses, “for I always go with them myself when I can.”

“Capital dodge, too,” assented Cuddy, “gets the fellers past the public-houses—that drink’s the ruin of half the huntsmen in England;” whereupon he took another good swig.

“Then Monsieur and you’ll all go together, I suppose,” interrupted Dribbler, who wanted to see the fun.

“Monsieur, Monsieur—oh, ah, that’s my friend Pringle’s valet,” observed Sir Moses, drily; “what about him?”

“Why, he’s going, isn’t he?” replied Dribbler.

“Oh, poor fellow, no,” rejoined Sir Moses; “he doesn’t want to go—it’s no use persecuting a poor devil because he’s a Frenchman.”

“But I daresay he’d enjoy it very much,” observed Dribbler.

“Well, then, will you mount him?” asked Sir Moses.

“Why, I thought *you* were going to do it,” replied Dribbler.

“*Me* mount him!” exclaimed Sir Moses, throwing out his

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ringed hands in well-feigned astonishment, as if he had never made such an offer—"Me mount him! why, my dear fellow, do you know how many people I have to mount as it is? Let me tell you," continued he, counting them off on his fingers, "there's Tom, and there's Harry, and there's Joe, and there's the pad-groom and myself, five horses out every day—generally six, when I've a hack—six horses a day, four days a week—if that isn't enough, I don't know what is—dom'd if I do," added he, with a snort and a determined jerk of his head.

"Well, but we can manage him a mount among us, somehow, I daresay," persevered Dribbler, looking round upon the now partially smoke-obsured company.

"Oh, no, let him alone, poor fellow; let him alone," replied Sir Moses, coaxingly, adding, "he evidently doesn't wish to go—evidently doesn't wish to go."

"I don't know that," exclaimed Cuddy Flintoff, with a knowing jerk of his head; "I don't know that—I should say he's rather a y-o-o-icks wind 'im! y-o-i-cks push 'im up! sort of chap." So saying, Cuddy drained his glass to the dregs.

"I should say you're rather a y-o-i-cks wind 'im—y-o-i-cks drink 'im up sort of chap," replied Sir Moses, at which they all laughed heartily.

Cuddy availed himself of the *divertissement* to make another equally strong brew—saying, "It was put there to drink, wasn't it?" at which they all laughed again.

Still there was a disposition to harp upon the hunt—Dribbler tied on the scent, and felt disposed to lend Jack a horse if nobody else would. So he threw out a general observation, that he thought they could manage a mount for Monsieur among them.

"Well, but perhaps his master mayn't like it," suggested Sir Moses, in hopes that Billy would come to the rescue.

"O, I don't care about it," replied Billy, with an air of indifference, who would have been glad to hunt by deputy if he could, and so that chance fell to the ground.

"*Hoick to Governor! Hoick to Governor!*" cheered Cuddy at the declaration. "Now who'll lend him a horse?" asked he,



CUDDY FLINTOFF.

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taking up the question. "What say you, Stub?" appealing to Mr. Strongstubble, who generally had more than he could ride.

"He's such a beefy beggar," replied Strongstubble, between the whiffs of a cigar.

"Oh, ah, and a Frenchman too!" interposed Sir Moses, "he'll have no idea of saving a horse, or holding a horse together, or making the most of a horse."

"Put him on one that 'ill take care of himself," suggested Cuddy; "there's your old Nutcracker horse, for instance," added he, addressing himself to Harry Waggett.

"Got six drachms of aloes," replied Waggett, drily.

"Or your Te-to-tum, Booty," continued Cuddy, nothing baffled by the failure.

"Lame all round," replied Booty, following suit.

"Hut you and your lames," rejoined Cuddy, who knew better—"I'll tell you what you must do then, Tommy," continued he, addressing himself familiarly to Dribbler, "you must lend him your old kicking chestnut—the very horse for a Frenchman," added Cuddy, slapping his own tight-trowsered leg—"you send the Shaver to the Billet in the morning along with your own horse, and old Johnny Crapaud will manage to get there somehow or other—walk if he can't ride: shoemaker's pony's very safe."

"Oh, I'll send him in my dogcart if that's all," exclaimed Sir Moses, again waxing generous.

"That 'ill do! That 'ill do!" replied Cuddy, appealing triumphantly to the brandy. Then as the outdoor guests began to depart, and the indoor ones to wind up their watches and ask about breakfast, Cuddy took advantage of one of Sir Moses' momentary absences in the entrance hall to walk off to bed with the remainder of the bottle of brandy, observing, as he hurried away, that he was "apt to have spasms in the night;" and Sir Moses, thinking he was well rid of him at the price, went through the ceremony of asking the "remanets" if they would take any more, and being unanimously answered in the negative, he lit the bedroom candles, turned off the *moderateurs*, and left the room to darkness and to Bankhead.

ASK MAMMA.

CHAPTER L.

GOING TO COVER WITH THE HOUNDS.



A Whipper-in.

HOW different a place generally proves to what we anticipate, and how difficult it is to recall our expectations after we have once seen it, unless we have made a memorandum beforehand. How different again a place looks in the morning to what we have conjectured overnight.

What we have taken

for towers perhaps have proved to be trees, and the large alke in front a mere floating mist.

Pangburn Park had that loose rakish air peculiar to rented places, which carry a sort of visible contest between landlord and tenant on the face of everything. A sort of "it's you to do it, not me" look. It showed a sad want of paint and maintenance generally. Sir Moses wasn't the man to do anything that wasn't absolutely necessary, "Dom'd if he was," so inside and outside were pretty much alike.

Our friend Billy Pringle was not a man of much observation in rural matters, though he understood the cut of a coat, the tie of a watch ribbon cravat, or the fit of a collar thoroughly. We are sorry to say he had not slept very well, having taken

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too much brandy for conformity's sake, added to which his bed was hard and knotty, and the finely drawn bolsters and pillows all piled together were hardly sufficient to raise his throbbing temples. As he lay tossing and turning about, thinking now of Clara Yammerton's beautiful blue eyes and exquisitely rounded figure, now of Flora's bright hair, or Harriet's graceful form, the dread Monsieur entered his shabbily furnished bedroom, with, "Sare, I have de pleasure to bring you your pink to-day," at once banishing the beauties and recalling the overnight's conversation, the frightful fences, the yawning ditches, the bottomless brooks, with the unanimous declaration that the man who could ride over Hit-im-and-Hold-im-shire could ride over any country in the world. And Billy really thought if he could get over the horrors of that day he would retire from the purgatorial pleasures of the chase altogether.

With this wise resolution he jumped out of bed with the vigorous determination of a man about to take a shower bath, and proceeded to invest himself in the only mitigating features of the chase, the red coat and leathers. He was hardly well in them before a clamorous bell rang for breakfast, quickly followed by a knock at the door, announcing that it was on the table.

Sir Moses was always in a deuce of a hurry on a hunting morning. Our hero was then presently performing the coming downstairs feat he is represented doing in Volume I., page 203, and on reaching the lower regions he jumped in with a dish of fried ham which led him straight to the breakfast-room.

Here Sir Moses was doing all things at once, reading the "Post," blowing his beak, making the tea, stirring the fire, crumpling his envelopes, cussing the toast, and doming the footman, to which numerous avocations he now added the pleasing one of welcoming our Billy.

"Well done you! First down, I do declare!" exclaimed he, tendering him his left hand, his right one being occupied with his kerchief. "Sit down, and let's be at it," continued he, kicking a rush-bottomed chair under Billy as it were, adding "never wait for any man on a hunting morning." So saying, he proceeded to snatch an egg, in doing which he upset the



BILLY PRINGLE AND JACK ROGERS.

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cream jug. "Dom the thing," growled he, "what the deuce do they set it there for! D'ye take tea?" now asked he, pointing to the tea-pot with his knife—or "Coffee?" continued he, pointing to the coffee-pot with his fork, or "both p'r'aps," added he, without waiting for an answer to either question, but pushing both pots towards his guest, following up the advance with ham, eggs, honey, buns, butter, bread, toast, jelly, everything within reach, until he got Billy fairly blocked with good things, when he again set-to on his own account munching and crunching, and ended by nearly dragging all the contents of the table on to the floor by catching the cloth with his spur as he got up to go away.

He then went doming and scuttling out of the room, charging Billy if he meant to go with the hounds to "look sharp."

During his absence Stephen Booty and Mr. Silverthorn came dawdling into the room, taking it as easy as men generally do who have their horses on and don't care much about hunting.

Indeed Silverthorn never disguised that he would rather have his covers under plough than under gorse, and was always talking about the rent he lost, which he estimated at two pounds an acre, and Sir Moses at ten shillings.

Finding the coast clear, they now rang for fresh ham, fresh eggs, fresh tea, fresh everything, and then took to pumping Billy as to his connection with the house, Sir Moses having made him out over night to be a son of Sir Jonathan Pringle's, with whom he sometimes claimed cousinship, and they wanted to get a peep at the Baronetage if they could. In the midst of their subtle examination, Sir Moses came hurrying back, whip in one hand, hat in the other, throwing open the door, with, "Now, are you ready?" to Billy, and "Morning, gentlemen," to Booty and Silverthorn.

Then Billy rose with the desperate energy of a man going to a dentist's, and seizing his cap and whip off the entrance table, followed Sir Moses through the intricacies of the back passages leading to the stables, nearly falling over a coal scuttle as he went. They presently changed the tunnel-like darkness of the passage into the garish light of day, by the opening of the dirty back door.

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Descending the little flight of stone steps, they then entered the stable-yard, now enlivened with red coats and the usual concomitants of hounds leaving home. There was then an increased commotion, stable doors flying open, from which arch-necked horses emerged, pottering and feeling for their legs as they went. Off the cobble stone pavement, and on to the grass grown soft of the centre, they stood more firm and unflinching. Then Sir Moses took one horse, Tom Findlater another, Harry the first whip a third, Joe the second whip a fourth, while the blue-coated pad groom came trotting round on foot from the back stables, between Sir Moses' second horse and Napoleon the Great.

Billy dived at his horse without look or observation, and the clang of departure being now at its height, the sash of a second floor window flew up, and a white cotton night-capped head appeared bellowing out, “*Y-o-i-cks wind 'im! y-o-i-cks push 'im up!*” adding, “*Didn't I tell ye it was going to be a hunting morning?*”

“Ay, ay, Cuddy, you did,” replied Sir Moses, laughing, muttering as he went: “That's about the extent of your doings.”

“He'll be late, won't he?” asked Billy, spurring up alongside of the Baronet.

“Oh, he's only an afternoon sportsman that,” replied Sir Moses; adding, “he's greatest after dinner.”

“Indeed!” mused Billy, who had looked upon him with the respect due to a regular flyer, a man who could ride over Hit-im and Hold-im-shire itself.

The reverie was presently interrupted by the throwing open of the kennel door, and the clamorous rush of the glad pack to the advancing red coats, making the greensward look quite gay and joyful.

“Gently, there! gently!” cried Tom Findlater, and first and second whips falling into places, Tom gathered his horse together and trotted briskly along the side of the ill-kept carriage road, and on through the dilapidated lodges: a tattered hat protruding through the window of one, and two brown

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paper panes supplying the place of glass in the other. They then got upon the high road, and the fiery edge being taken off both hounds and horses, Tom relaxed into the old post-boy pace, while Sir Moses proceeded to interrogate him as to the state of the kennel generally, how Rachael's feet were, whether Prosperous was any better, if Abelard had found his way home, and when Sultan would be fit to come out again.

They then got upon other topics connected with the chase, such as, who the man was that Harry saw shooting in Tinklerfield cover; if Mrs. Swan had said anything more about her confounded poultry; and whether Ned Smith the rat-catcher would take half a sovereign for his terrier or not.

Having at length got all he could out of Tom, Sir Moses then let the hounds flow past him, while he held back for our Billy to come up. They were presently trotting along together a little in the rear of Joe, the second whip.

"I've surely seen that horse before," at length observed Sir Moses, after a prolonged stare at our friend's steed.

"Very likely," replied Billy, "I bought him of the Major."

"The deuce you did!" exclaimed Sir Moses, "then that's the horse young Tabberton had."

"What, you know him, do you?" asked Billy.

"Know him! I should think so," rejoined Moses; "everybody knows him."

"Indeed!" observed Billy, wondering whether for good or evil.

"I daresay, now, the Major would make you give thirty, or five-and-thirty pounds for that horse," observed Sir Moses, after another good stare.

"Far more!" replied Billy, gaily, who was rather proud of having given a hundred guineas.

"Far more!" exclaimed Sir Moses with energy; "far more! Ah!" added he, with a significant shake of the head, "he's an excellent man, the Major—an excellent man—but a *leetle* too keen in the matter of horses."

Just at this critical moment Tommy Heslop of Hawthorn-dean, who had been holding back in Crow-Tree Lane to let the

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hounds pass, now emerged from his halting-place with a “Good morning, Sir Moses, here’s a fine hunting morning?”

“Good morning, Tommy, good morning,” replied Sir Moses, extending his right hand; for Tommy was a five-and-twenty pounder besides giving a cover, and of course was deserving of every encouragement.

The salute over, Sir Moses then introduced our friend Billy,—“Mr. Pringle, a Featherbedfordshire gentleman, Mr. Heslop,” which immediately excited Tommy’s curiosity—not to say jealousy—for the “Billet” was very “contagious,” for several of the Peer’s men, who always brought their best horses, and did as much mischief as they could, and after ever so good a run, declared it was nothing to talk of. Tommy thought Billy’s horse would not take much cutting down, whatever the rider might do. Indeed the good steed looked anything but formidable, showing that a bad stable, though “only for one night,” may have a considerable effect upon a horse. His coat was dull and henfeathered; his eye was watery, and after several premonitory sneezes, he at length mastered a cough. Even Billy thought he felt rather less of a horse under him than he liked. Still he didn’t think much of a cough. “Only a slight cold,” as a young lady says when she wants to go to a ball.

Three horsemen in front, two black coats and a red, and two reds joining the turnpike from the Witchberry road, increased the cavalcade and exercised Sir Moses’ ingenuity in appropriating backs and boots and horses. “That’s Simon Smith,” said he to himself, eyeing a pair of desperately black tops dangling below a very plum-coloured long-backed, short-lapped jacket. “Ah! and Tristram Wood,” added he, now recognising his companion. He then drew gradually upon them and returned their salutes with an extended wave of the hand that didn’t look at all like money. Sir Moses then commenced speculating on the foremost group. There was Peter Linch and Charley Drew; but who was the fellow in black? He couldn’t make out.

“Who’s the man in black, Tommy?” at length asked he of Tommy Heslop.

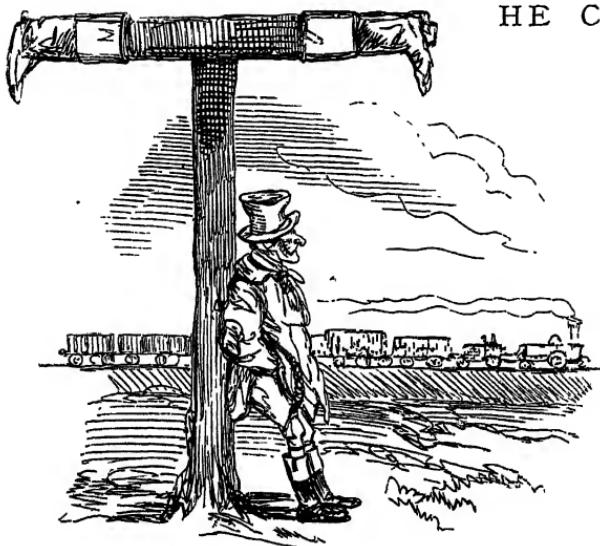
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"Don't know," replied Tommy, after scanning the stranger attentively.

"It can't be that nasty young Rowley Abingdon; and yet I believe it is," continued Sir Moses, eyeing him attentively, and seeing that he did not belong to the red couple, who evidently kept aloof from him. "It *is* that nasty young Abingdon," added he. "Wonder at his impittance in coming out with me. It's only the other day that ugly old Owl of a father of his killed me young Cherisher, the best hound in my pack," whereupon the Baronet began grinding his teeth, and brewing a little politeness wherewith to bespatter the young Owl as he passed. The foremost horses hanging back to let their friends the hounds overtake them, Sir Moses was presently alongside the black coat, and finding he was right in his conjecture as to who it contained, he returned the youth's awkward salute with, "Well, my man, how d'ye do? hope you're well. How's your father? hope he's well," adding, "dom 'im, he should be hung, and you may tell 'im I said so." Sir Moses then felt his horse gently with his heel, and trotted on to salute the red couple. And thus he passed from singles to doubles, and from doubles to triples, and from triples to quartets, and back to singles again, including the untold occupants of various vehicles, until the ninth milestone on the Bushmead road, announced their approach to the Crooked Billet. Tom Findlater then pulled up from the postboy jog into a walk, at which pace he turned into the little green field on the left of the blue and gold swinging sign. Here he was received by the earthstopper, the antediluvian ostler, and other great officers of state. But for Sir Moses' presence the question would then have been "What will you have to drink?" That however being interdicted, they raised a discussion about the weather, one insisting that it was going to be a frost; another, that it was going to be nothing of the sort.

CHAPTER LI.

THE MEET.



The Crumpletin Railway.

HE Crooked Billet Hotel and Posting house, on the Bushmead road, had been severed from society by the Crumpletin Railway. It had indeed been cut off in the prime of life: for Joe Cherriper, the velvet-collared doeskin-

gloved Jehu of the fast Regulator Coach, had backed his opinion of the preference of the public for horse transit over steam, by laying out several hundred pounds of his accumulated fees upon the premises, just as the surveyors were setting out the line.

"A rally might be 'andy enough for goods and 'eavy marchandise," Joe said; "but as to gents ever travellin' by sich contraband means, that was utterly and entirely out of the question. Never would 'appen so long as there was a well-appointed coach like the Regulator to be 'ad." So Joe laid on

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the green paint and the white paint, and furbished up the sign until it glittered resplendent in the rays of the mid-day sun. But greater prophets than Joe have been mistaken.

One fine summer's afternoon a snorting steam-engine came puffing and panting through the country upon a private road of its own, drawing after it the accumulated rank, beauty, and fashion of a wide district to open the railway, which presently sucked up all the trade and traffic of the country. The Crooked Billet fell from a first-class way-side house at which eight coaches changed horses twice a-day into a very seedy unfrequented place—a very different one to what it was when our hero's mother, then Miss Willing, changed horses on travelling up in the Old True Blue Independent, on the auspicious day that she captured Mr. Pringle. Still it was visited with occasional glimpses of its former greatness in the way of the meets of the hounds, when the stables were filled, and the long-deserted rooms rang with the revelry of visitors. This was its first gala-day of the season, and several of the Featherbedfordshire gentlemen availed themselves of the fitness of the weather to see Sir Moses' hounds, and try whether they, too, could ride over Hit-im and Hold-im shire.

The hounds had scarcely had their roll on the greensward, and old black Challenger proclaimed their arrival with his usual deep-toned vehemence, ere all the converging roads and lanes began pouring in their tributaries, and the space before the bay-windowed red brick-built "Billet" was soon blocked with gentlemen on horseback, gentlemen in Malvern dog-carts, gentlemen in Newport Pagnell, gentlemen in Croydon clothes-baskets, some divesting themselves of their wraps, some stretching themselves after their drive, some calling for brandy, some for baccy, some for both brandy and baccy.

Then followed the usual inquiries, "Is Dobbinson coming?" "Where's the Damper?" "Has anybody seen anything of Gameboy Green?" Next, the heavily-laden family vehicles began to arrive, containing old fat *paterfamilias* in the red coat of his youth, with his "missis" by his side, and a couple of buxom daughters behind, one of whom will be installed in the

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driving seat when papa resigns. Thus we have the Mellows of Mawdsley Hill, the Chalkers of Streetley, and the Richleys of Jollyduck Park, and the cry is still, “They come! they come!” It is going to be a bumper meet, for the foxes are famous, and the sight of a good “get away” is worth a dozen Legers put together.

See here comes a nice quiet-looking, little old gentleman in a well-brushed flat-brimmed hat, a bird’s-eye cravat, a dark-grey coat buttoned over a step-collared toilanette vest, nearly matching in hue his delicate cream-coloured leathers, who everybody stares at and then salutes, as he lifts first one rose-tinted top and then the other working his way through the crowd, on a thoroughbred snaffle-bridled bay. He now makes up to Sir Moses, who exclaims as the raised hat shows the familiar blue-eyed face, “Ah! Dicky, my man! how d’ye do? glad to see you!” and taking off his glove the Baronet gives our old friend Boggledike a hearty shake of the hand. Dicky acknowledges the honour with becoming reverence, and then begins talking of sport and the splendid runs they have been having, while Sir Moses, instead of listening, cons over some to give him in return.

But who have we here sitting so square in the tandem-like dog-cart, drawn by the high-stepping white-legged bay with sky-blue rosettes and long streamers, doing the pride that apes humility in a white mackintosh, that shows the pink collar to great advantage? Imperial John, we do believe?

Imperial John, it is! He has come all the way from Barley Hill Hall, leaving the people on the farm and the plate in the drawing-room to take care of themselves, starting before daylight, while his footman groom has lain out over night to the serious detriment of a half sovereign. As John now pulls up, with a trace-rattling ring, he cocks his Imperial chin and looks round for applause—a “Well done, you!” or something of that sort, for coming such a distance. Instead of that, a line of winks, and nods, and nudges, follow his course, one man whispering another, “I say, here’s old Imperial John,” or “I say, look at Miss de Glancey’s boy;” while the

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young ladies turn their eyes languidly upon him to see what sort of a hero the would-be Benedict is. His Highness, however, has quite got over his de Glancey failure, and having wormed his way after divers "with your leaves," and "by your leaves," through the intricacies of the crowd, he now pulls up at the inn door, and standing erect in his dog-cart, sticks his whip in the socket, and looks around with a "This is Mr. Hybrid the-friend-of-an-Earl" sort of air.

"Ah! Hybrid, how d'ye do?" now exclaims Sir Moses familiarly; "hope you're well?—how's the Peer? hope he's well. Come all the way from Barley Hill?"

"Barley Hill *Hall*," replies the great man with an emphasis on the Hall, adding in the same breath, "Oi say, ostler, send moy fellow!" whereupon there is a renewed nudging and whispering among the ladies beside him, of "That's Mr. Hybrid!" "That's Imperial John, the gentleman who wanted 'to marry Miss de Glancey,'" for though Miss de Glancey was far above having him, she was not above proclaiming the offer.

His Highness then becomes an object of inquisitive scrutiny by the fair; one thinking he might do for Lavinia Edwards; another, for Sarah Bates; a third, for Rachel Bell; a fourth, perhaps, for herself. It must be a poor creature that isn't booked for somebody.

Still, John stands erect in his vehicle, flourishing his whip, hallooing and asking for his fellow.

"Ring the bell for moy fellow!—Do go for moy fellow!—Has anybody seen moy fellow? Have *you* seen moy fellow?" addressing an old smock-frocked countryman with a hoe in his hand.

"Nor, arm d——d if iver ar i did!" replied the veteran, looking him over, a declaration that elicited a burst of laughter from the bystanders, and an indignant chuck of the Imperial chin from our John.

"*Tweet, tweet, tweet!*" who have we here? All eyes turn up the Cherryburn Road; the roused hounds prick their ears, and are with difficulty restrained from breaking away. It's Walker, the cross postman's gig, and he is treating himself to a twang

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of the horn. But who has he with him? Who is the red arm-folded man lolling with as much dignity as the contracted nature of the vehicle will allow? A man in red, with cap and beard, and all complete. Why, it's Monsieur! Monsieur coming *in forma pauperis*, after Sir Moses' liberal offer to send him to cover—Monsieur in a faded old sugar-loaf shaped cap, and a scanty coat that would have been black if it hadn't been red.

Still Walker trots him up like a man proud of his load amid the suppressed titters and “Who’s this?” of the company Sir Moses immediately vouchsafes him protection—by standing erect in his stirrups, and exclaiming, with a wave of his right hand, “Ah, Monsieur! *comment vous portez-vous?*”

“Pretty bobbish, I tenk you, sare, opes you are vell yourself and all de leetle Mainchances,” replied Monsieur, rising in the gig, showing the scrimpiness of his coat and the amplitude of his cinnamon-coloured peg-top trowsers, thrust into green-topped opera boots, much in the style of old Paul Pry. Having put something into Walker’s hand, Monsieur alights with due caution, and Walker whipping on, presently shows the gilt “V. R.” on the back of his red gig as he works his way through the separating crowd. Walker claims to be one of Her Majesty’s servants; if not to rank next to Lord Palmerston, at all events, not to be far below him. And now Monsieur being left to himself, thrusts his Malacca cane whip-stick under his arm, and drawing on a pair of half-dirty primrose-coloured kid gloves, pokes into the crowd in search of his horse, making up to every disengaged one he saw, with “Is dees for me? Is dees for me?”

Meanwhile Imperial John, having emancipated himself from his mackintosh, and had his horse placed becomingly at the step of the dog-cart, so as to transfer himself without alighting, and let everybody see the magnificence of the establishment, now souces himself into the saddle of a fairish young grey, and turns round to confront the united field; feeling by no means the smallest man in the scene. “Hybrid!” exclaims Sir Moses, seeing him approach the still dismounted Monsieur,

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" Hybrid! let me introduce my friend Rougier, Monsieur Rougier, Mr. Hybrid! of Barley Hill Hall, a great friend of Lord Ladythorne's," whereupon off went the faded sugar-loaf-shaped cap, and down came the Imperial hat, Sir Moses interlarding the ceremony with, "great friend of Louis Nap's, great friend of Louis Nap's," by way of balancing the Ladythorne recommendation of John. The two then struck up a most energetic conversation, each being uncommonly taken with the other. John almost fancied he saw his way to the Tuilleries, and wondered what Miss "somebody" would say if he got there.

The conversation was at length interrupted by Dribbler's grinning groom touching Jack behind as he came up with a chestnut horse, and saying, "Please, Sir, here's your screw."

"Ah, my screw, is it!" replied Jack, turning round, "dat is a queer name for a horse—screw—hopes he's a good 'un."

"A good 'un, and nothin' but a good 'un," replied the groom, giving him a punch in the ribs, to make him form up to Jack, an operation that produced an ominous grunt.

"Vell," said Jack, proceeding to dive at the stirrup with his foot without taking hold of the reins; "if Screw is a good 'un I sall make you handsome present—tuppence a penny, p'raps—if he's a bad 'un, I sall give you good crack on the skoll," Jack flourishing his thick whip-stick as he spoke.

"Will you!" replied the man, leaving go of the rein, whereupon down went the horse's head, up went his heels, and Jack was presently on his shoulder.

"Oh, de devil!" roared Jack, "he vill distribute me! he vill distribute me! I vill be killed! Nobody sall save me! here, garçon, grum!" roared he amid the mirth of the company. "Lay 'old of his 'ead! lay 'old of his 'ocks! lay 'old of his 'eels! Oh, murder! murder!" continued he, in well-feigned dismay, throwing out his supplicating arms. Off jumped Imperial John to the rescue of his friend, and seizing the dangling rein, chucked up the horse's head with a resolute jerk that restored Jack to his seat.

"Ah, my friend, I see you are not much used to the saddle,"



Sack Rogers putting his nerves to rights

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observed his Highness, proceeding to console the friend of an Emperor.

"Vell, sare, I am, and I am not," replied Jack, mopping his brow, and pretending to regain his composure, "I am used to de leetle 'orse at de roundabout at de fair, I can carry off de ring ten time out of twice, but these great unruly, unmannerly, undutiful screws, are more than a match for old Harry."

"Just so," assented his Highness, with a chuck of his Imperial chin, "just so;" adding in an undertone, "then I'll tell you what we'll do—I'll tell you what we'll do—we'll pop into the bar at the back of the house, and have a glass of something to strengthen our nerves."

"By all means, sare," replied Jack, who was always ready for a glass. So they quietly turned the corner, leaving the field to settle their risible faculties, while they summoned the pretty cork-screw ringletted Miss Tubbs to their behests.

"What shall it be?" asked Imperial John, as the smiling young lady tripped down the steps to where they stood.

"Brandy," replied Jack, with a good English accent.

"Two brandies!" demanded Imperial John, with an air of authority.

"Cold *with?*" asked the lady, eyeing Monsieur's grim visage.

"Neat!" exclaimed Jack, in a tone of disdain.

"Yes, Sir," assented the lady, bustling away.

"Shilling glasses!" roared Jack, at the last flounce of her blue muslin.

Presently she returned bearing two glasses of very brown brandy, and each having appropriated one, Jack began grinning and bowing and complimenting the donor.

"Sare," said he, after smelling at the beloved liquor, "I have moch pleasure in making your 'quaintance. I am moch pleased, sare, with the expression of your mog. I tink, sare, you are de 'andsomest man I never had de pleasure of lookin' at. If, sare, dey had you in my country, sare, dey vod make you a King—Emperor, I mean. I drink, sare, your vare good health," so saying, Jack swigged off the contents of his glass at a draught.

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Imperial John felt constrained to do the same.

"Better now," observed Jack, rubbing his stomach as the liquid fire began to descend. "Better now," repeated he, with a jerk of his head. "Sare," continued he, "I sall return de compliment—I sall treat you to a glass."

Imperial John would rather not. He was a glass of sherry and a biscuit sort of man ; but Monsieur was not to be balked in his liberality. "Oh, yes, sare, make me de pleasure to accept a glass," continued Jack. "Here ! Jemima ! Matilda ! Adelaide ! vot the doose do they call de young womans—look sharp," added he, as she now reappeared. "Apportez, dat is to say, bring tout suite, directly ; two more glasses ; dis gentlemans vill be goode enough to drink my vare good 'ealth."

"Certainly," replied the smiling lady, tripping away for them.

"Ah, sare, it is de stoff to make de 'air corl," observed Jack, eyeing his new acquaintance. "Ve sall go like old chaff before the vind after it. Vill catch de fox myself."

The first glass had nearly upset our Imperial friend, and the second one appeared perfectly nauseous. He would give anything that Jack would drink them both himself. However, Monsieur motioned blue muslin to present the tray to John first, so he had no alternative but to accept. Jack then took his glass, and smacking his lips, said—"I looks, sare, towards you, sare, with all de respect due to your immortal country. De English, sare, are de finest nation under de moon ; and you, sare, and you are as fine a specimens of dat nation as never vas seen. Two such mans as you, sare, could have taken Sébastopol. You could vop all de 'ell 'ound savage Sepoys by yourself. So now, sare," continued Jack, brandishing his glass, "make ready, present, *fire*!" and at the word fire, he drained off his glass, and then held it upside down to show he had emptied it.

Poor Imperial John was obliged to follow suit.

The Imperial head now began to swim. Mr. Hybrid saw two girls in blue muslin, two Monsieurs, two old yellow Po-chaises, two water-carts with a Cochin-China cock a gollowing a-top of each.



PARTANT POUR LA SYRIE.

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Jack, on the contrary, was quite comfortable. He had got his nerves strung, and was now ready for anything. "S'pose, now," said he, addressing his staring, half-bewildered friend, "you ascend your gallant grey, and let us look after dese mighty chasseurs. But stop," added he, "I will first pay for de tipple," pretending to dive into his peg-top trowsers pocket for his purse. "*Ah! malheureusement,*" exclaimed he, after feeling them both, "I have left my blont, my tin, in my oder trowsers pockets. Navare mind! navare mind," continued he, gaily, "ve vill square it up some other day. Here," added he to the damsel, "dis gentlemans vill pay, and I vill settle vid him some oder day—some oder day." So saying, Jack gathered his horse boldly together, and spurred out of the inn-yard in a masterly way, singing *Partant pour la Syrie* as he went.

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CHAPTER LII.

A BIRD'S EYE VIEW.



HEN the friends reappeared at the front of the Crooked Billet Hotel the whole cavalcade had swept away, leaving only the return ladies, and such of the grooms as meant to have a drink now that "master was safe." Sir Moses had not paid either Louis Napoleon's or Lord Ladythorne's friend the compliment of waiting for them. On the contrary, having hailed the last heavy subscriber who was in the habit of using the Crooked Billet meet, he hallooed the huntsman to trot briskly away down Rickleton Lane, and across Beecham pastures, as well to shake off the foot people, as to prevent any attempted attendance on the part of the carriage company. Sir Moses, though very gallant, was not always in the chattering mood; and, assuredly, if ever a master of hounds may be excused for a little abruptness, it is when he is tormented by the rival spirits of the adjoining hunt—people who always see things so differently to the men of the country, so differently to what they are meant to do.

It was evident however by the lingering looks and position of parties that the hunt had not been long gone—indeed, the last red coat might still be seen bobbing up and down past the weak and low parts of the Rickleton Lane fence. So Monsieur, having effected a satisfactory rounding, set his horse's head that way, much in the old threepence a-mile and hopes for something over, style of his youth. Jack hadn't forgotten how to

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ride, though he might occasionally find it convenient to pretend to be a tailor. Indeed, his horse seemed to have ascertained the fact, and instead of playing any more monkey-tricks, he began to apply himself sedulously to the road. Imperial John was now a fitter subject for solicitude than Monsieur, his Highness's usual bumptious bolt-upright seat being exchanged for a very slouchy, vulgar roll. His saucy eyes too seemed dim and dazzled, like an owl's flying against the sun. Some of the toiling pedestrians, who in spite of Sir Moses' intention to leave them in the lurch, had started for the hunt, were the first overtaken; next two grinning boys riding a bare-backed donkey, one with his face to the tail, doing the flagellation with an old hearth-brush; then a brandy-nosed horse-breaker, with a badly-grown black colt that didn't promise to be good for anything; next Dr. Linton on his dun pony, working his arms and legs most energetically, riding far faster than his nag; next Noggan, the exciseman, stealing quietly along on his mule as though he were bent on his business and had no idea of a hunt; and at length a more legitimate representative of the chase in the shape of young Mr. Hadaway, of Oakharrow Hill, in a pair of very baggy white cords, on but indifferent terms about the knees with his badly-cleaned tops. They did not, however, overtake the hounds, and the great body of scarlet, till just as they turned off the Summersham Road into an old pasture-field, some five acres of the low end of which had been cut off for a gorse to lay to the adjoining range of rocky hills, whose rugged juniper and broom-dotted sides afforded very comfortable and popular lying for the foxes. It being, if a find, a quick "get away," all hands were too busy thinking of themselves and their horses, and looking for their usual opponents, to take heed of anything else, and Jack and his friend entered without so much as an observation from any one.

Just at that moment up went Joe's cap on the top of the craig, and the scene changed to one of universal excitement. Then, indeed, had come the tug of war! Sir Moses, all hilarity, views the fox! Now Stephen Booty sees

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him, now Peter Lynch, and now a whole cluster of hats are off in his honour.

* * * * *

And now his honour's off himself—

“Shrill horns proclaim his flight.”

Oh dear! oh dear! where's Billy Pringle?

Oh dear! oh dear! where's Imperial John?

Oh dear! where's Jack Rogers?

Jack's all right! There he is grinning with enthusiasm, quite forgetting that he's a Frenchman, and hoisting his brown cap with the best of them. Another glass would have made him give a stunning view-holloa.

Imperial John stares like a man just awoke from a dream. Is he in bed, or is he out hunting, or how! He even thinks he hears Miss de Glancey's “*Si-r-r!* do you mean to insult me?” ringing in his ears.

Billy Pringle! poor Billy! he's not so unhappy as usual. His horse is very docile. His tail has lost all its elegant gaiety, and altogether he has a very drooping, weedy look: he coughs, too, occasionally. Billy, however, doesn't care about the coughs, and gives him a dig with his spur to stop it.

“Come along, Mr. Pringle, come along!” now shrieks Sir Moses, hurrying past, hands down, head too, hugging and spurring his horse as he goes. He is presently through the separating throng, leaving Billy far in the rear. “*Quick's*” the word, or the chance is lost. There are no reserved places at a hunt. A flying fox admits of no delay. It is either go or stay.

And now, Monsieur Jean Rougier having stuck his berry-brown conical cap tight on his bristly black head, crams his chestnut horse through the crowd, hallooing to his transfixed brandy friend, “Come along, old cock-a-doodle! come along, old Blink Bonny!”

Imperial John, who has been holding a mental conference with himself, poising himself in the saddle, and making a

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general estimate of his condition, thinking he is not so drunk as "all that," accepts the familiar challenge, and urges his horse on with the now flying crowd. He presently makes a bad shot at a gate on the swing, which, catching him on the knee-cap, contributes very materially to restore his sobriety, the pain making him first look back for his leg, which he thinks must be off, and then forward at the field. It is very large : two bustling Baronets, two Monsieurs, two huntsmen, two Flying Hatters—everybody in duplicate, in short.

Away they scud up Thorneycroft Valley at a pace that looks very like killing. The foremost rise the hill, hugging and holding on by the manes.

"I'll go!" says his Highness to himself, giving up rubbing his knee-cap, and settling himself in his saddle, he hustles his horse, and pushing past the undecided ones, is presently in the thick of the fray. There is Jack going, elbows and legs, elbows and legs, at a very galloping, dreary, done sort of pace, the roaring animal he bestrides contracting its short, leg tied efforts every movement. Jack presently begins to objurgate the ass who lent it him ; first wishes he was on himself, then declares the tanner ought to have him. He now sits sideways, and proceeds to give him a good rib-roasting in the old postboy style.

And now there's a bobbing up and down of hats, caps, and horses' heads in front, with the usual deviation under the "hounds clauses consolidation act," where the dangerous fencing begins. A pair of white breeches are summersaulting in the air, and a bay horse is seen careering in a wild head in the air sort of way, back to the rear instead of following the hounds.

"That's lucky," said Jack Rogers to himself, as soon as he saw him coming towards him, and circumventing him adroitly at the corner of a turnip-field, he quits his own pumped-out animal and catches him. "That's good," said he, looking him over, seeing that he was a lively young animal in fairish condition, with a good saddle and bridle.

"Stirrups just my length, too, I do believe," continued he, preparing to mount. "All right, by Jove!" added he, settling

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himself into the saddle, feet well home, and gathering his horse together, he shot forward with the easy elasticity of breeding. It was a delightful change from the rolling cow-like action of the other.

"Let us see vot he 'as in his monkey," said Jack to himself, now drawing the flask from the saddle-case.

"Sherry, I fear," said he, uncorking it.

"Brandy, I declare," added he with delight, after smelling it. He then took a long pull at the contents.

"Good it is, too!" exclaimed he, smacking his lips; "better nor 've 'ad at de public;" so saying he took another long suck of it.

"May as vell finish it," continued he, shaking it at his ear to ascertain what was left; and having secured the remainder, he returned the monkey to the saddle-case, and put on his horse with great glee, taking a most independent line of his own.

Jack's triumph, however, was destined to be but of short duration. The fox being hard pressed, abandoned his original point for Collington Woods, and swerving to the left over Stanbury Hundred, was headed by a cur, and compelled to seek safety in a drain in the middle of a fallow field. The hounds were presently feathering over the mouth in the usual wild, disappointed sort of way, that as good as says, "No fault of ours, you know; if he won't stay above ground, we can't catch him for you."

Such of the field as had not ridden straight for Collington Woods, were soon down at the spot; and while the usual inquiries, "Where's Pepper?" "Where's Viper?" "Where can we get a spade?" "Does anybody know anything about the direction of this drain?" were going on, a fat, fair, red-coated flushed-faced pedestrian—to wit, young Mr. Treadcroft, the woolstapler's son of Harden Grange and Hinton, dived into the thick of the throng, and making up to Monsieur, exclaimed in an anger-choked voice, "This (puff) is my (gasp) horse! What the (gasp, puff) devil do you mean by riding away with him in this (puff, gasp) way?" the youth mopping his brow with a yellow bandanna as he spoke.

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“Your oss!” exclaimed Jack with the greatest effrontery. “Ou de doose can he be your oss? I catched ‘im fairly, and I’ve a right to ride him to de end of de run;” a claim that elicited the uproarious mirth of the field, who all looked upon the young wool-pack, as they called him, as a muff.

“Nonsense!” retorted the youth, half frantic with rage. “How can that be?”

“Ow can dat be,” repeated Jack, turning sideways in his saddle, and preparing to argue the case, “Ow can dat be? Dis hont, sare, I presume, sare, is condocted on de principle of de grand hont de Epping, vere every mans vot cotched anoder’s oss, is entitled to ride him to the end of de ron,” replied Jack, gravely.

“Nonsense!” again retorted the youth, amidst the renewed laughter of the field. “We know nothing of Epping hunts here!”

“Nothin’ of Epping onts here?” exclaimed Jack, throwing out his hands with well-feigned astonishment. “Nothin’ of Epping honts here! Vy, de grand hont de Epping rules all the oder honts, jost as the grand Clob de Jockey at Newmarket rules all oder Jockey Clubs in de kingdom.”

“Hoot, toot,” sneered the fat youth, “let’s have none of your jaw. Give me my horse, I say, how can he be yours?”

“Because, sare,” replied Jack, “I tells you I cotched ‘im fairly in de field. Bot for me he vod have been lost to society—to de vorld at large—eat up by de *loup*—by de volf—saddle, bridle, and all.”

“Nothing of the sort!” retorted Mr. Treadcroft, indignantly, “you had no business to touch him.”

Monsieur (with energy). “I appeal to you, Sare Moses Baronet, de grand maître de chien, de master of all de dogs and all de dogs’ vives, if I have not a right to ride ‘im.”

“Ah, I’m afraid, Monsieur, it’s not the law of this country,” replied Sir Moses, laughing. “It may be so in France, perhaps; but tell me, where’s your own horse?”

Monsieur. “Pomped out de beggar; had no go in ‘im; left him in a ditch.”



"GIVE ME MY HORSE, I SAY."

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Sir Moses. “ That’s a pity!—If you’d allowed me, I’d have sent you a good ‘un.”

Mr. Treadcroft, thus reinforced by Sir Moses’ decision, returned to the charge with redoubled vigour. “ If you don’t give me up my horse, sir,” says he, with firmness, “ I’ll give you in charge of the police for stealing him.” Then

“ Conscience, which makes cowards of us all,”

caused Jack to shrink at the recollection of his early indiscretion in the horse-stealing line, and instantly resolving not to give Jack Ketch a chance of taking any liberties with his neck, he thus addresses Mr. Treadcroft:—

“ Sare, if Sare Moses Baronet, de grand maître de chien, de grandmodder of all de dogs and all de dogs’ vives, says it is not a case of catch ‘im and keep ‘im ‘cordin’ to de rules of de grand hont de Epping, I must surrender de quadruped, but I must say it is dem un’andsome treatment, after I ’ave been at de trouble of catching ‘im.” So saying, Jack dropped off on the wrong side of the saddle, and giving the horse a slap on the side, left his owner to take him.

“ *Tally-ho! there he goes!*” now exclaimed a dozen voices, as out bounced the fox with a flourish of his well tagged brush that looked uncommonly defiant. What a commotion he caused! Every man lent a shout that seemed to be answered by a fresh effort from the flyer; but still, with twenty couple of overpowering animals after him, what chance did there seem for his life, especially when they could hunt him by his scent after they had lost sight? Every moment, however, improved his opportunity, and a friendly turn of the land shutting him out of view, the late darting, half-frantic pack were brought to their noses.

“ Hold hard for *one* minute!” is the order of the day.

“ Now, catch ‘em if you can!” is the cry.

Away they go in the settled determined way of a second start. The bolt taking place on the lower range of the gently swelling Culmington hills, that stretch across the north-east side of Hit-im and Hold-im shire, and the fox, making for the

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vale below, Monsieur has a good bird's-eye view of the scramble, without the danger and trouble of partaking of the struggle. Getting astride a newly stubbed ash-tree near the vacated drain mouth, he thus sits and soliloquises—"He's a pretty flyer, dat fox—if dey catch 'im afore he gets to the hills," eyeing a grey range undulating in the distance, "they'll do well. That Moff of a man," alluding to Treadcroft, "'ill never get there. At all events," chuckled Jack, "his brandy vont. Dat's 'im! I do believe," exclaimed Jack, "off again!" as a loose horse is now seen careering across a grass field. "No; dat is a black coat," continued Jack, as the owner now appeared crossing the field in pursuit of his horse. "Bot dat vill be 'im! dat vill be friend Moff," as a red rider now measures his length on the greensward of a field in the rear of the other one; and Jack, taking off his faded cap, waves it triumphantly as he distinctly recognises the wild, staring running of his late steed. "Dash my buttons!" exclaims he, working his arms as if he was riding, "bot if it hadn't been for dat unwarrantable, unchristianlike check, I'd ha' shown those red coats de vay on dat oss, for I *do* think he has de go in him and only vants shovin' along—Ah, Moff—my friend Moff!" laughed he, eyeing Treadcroft's vain endeavour to catch his horse, "you may as vell leave 'im where he is—you'll only fatigue yourself to no purpose. If you 'ad 'im you'd be off 'im again de next minute."

The telescope of the chase is now drawn out to the last joint, and Jack, as he sits, has a fine bird's-eye view of the scene. If the hounds go rather more like a flock of wild geese than like the horses in the chariot of the sun, so do the field, until the diminutive dots, dribbling through the vale, look like the line of a projected railway.

"If I mistake not," continued Jack, "dat little shining eel-like ting," eyeing a tortuous silvery thread meandering through the vale, "is vater, and dere vill be some fon by de time dey get there."

Jack is right in his conjecture. It is Long Brawlingford brook, with its rotten banks and deep eddying pools, describing

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all sorts of geographical singularities in its course through the country, too often inviting aspiring strangers to astonish the natives by riding at it, while the cautious countrymen rein in as they approach, and, eyeing the hounds, ride for a ford at the first splash.

Jack's friend, Blink Bonny, has ridden not amiss, considering his condition—at all events pretty forward, as may be inferred from his having twice crossed the Flying Hatter and come in for the spray of his censure. But for the fact of his Highness getting his hats of the flyer, he would most likely have received the abuse in the bulk. As it was, the hatter kept letting it go as he went.

And now as the hounds speed over the rich alluvial pastures by the brook, occasionally one throwing its tongue, occasionally another, for the scent is first-rate and the pace severe, there is a turning of heads, a checking of horses, and an evident inclination to diverge. Water is in no request.

“Who knows the ford?” cries Harry Waggett, who always declined extra risk—“You know the ford, Smith?” continued he, addressing himself to black tops.

“Not when I'm in a hur—hur—hurry,” ejaculated Smith, now fighting with his five year old bay.

“O'll show ye the ford!” cries Imperial John, gathering his grey together, and sending him at a stiff flight of outside slab-made rails which separate the field from the pack. This lands his Highness right among the tail hounds.

“Hold hard, Mr. Hybrid!” now bellows Sir Moses, indignant at the idea of a Featherbedfordshire farmer thinking to cut down his gallant field.

“One minnit! and you may go as hard as iver you like!” cries Tom Findlater, who now sees the crows hovering over his fox as he scuttles away on the opposite side of the brook.

There is then a great yawning of mouths and hauling of heads and renewed inquiries for fords—You know the ford, Brown? You know the ford, Green? Who knows the ford?

His Highness, thus snubbed and rebuked on all sides, is put on his mettle, and inwardly resolves not to be bullied by these



Imperial Sohni attempt to show the Magi

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low Hit-im and Hold-im shire chaps. "If they don't know what is due to the friend of an Earl, he will let them see that he does." So, regardless of their shouts, he shoves along with his Imperial chin well in the air, determined to ride at the brook—let those follow who will. He soon has a chance. The fox has taken it right in his line, without deviating a yard either way, and Woldsman, and Bluecap, and Ringwood, and Hazard, and Sparkler are soon swimming on his track, followed by the body of the screeching, vociferating pack.

Old Blink Bonny now takes a confused, wish-I-was-well-over, sort of look at the brook, shuddering when he thought how far he was from dry clothes. It is, however, too late to retreat. At it he goes in a half resolute sort of way, and in an instant the Imperial hat and the Imperial horse's head are all that appear above water.

"*Hoo-ray!*" cheer some of the unfeeling Hit-im and Hold-im shireites, dropping down into the ford a little below.

"*Hoo-ray!*" respond others on the bank, as the Red Otter, as Silverthorne calls his Highness, rises hatless to the top.

"Come here, and I'll help you out!" shouts Peter Lynch, eyeing Mr. Hybrid's vain darts first at the hat and then at the horse.

"Featherbedfordshire for ever!" cries Charley Drew, who doesn't at all like Imperial John.

And John, who finds the brook not only a great deal wider, but also a great deal deeper and colder than he expected, is in such a state of confusion that he lands on one side and his horse on the other, so that his chance of further distinction is out for the day. And as he stands shivering and shaking and emptying his hat, he meditates on the vicissitudes of life, the virtues of sobriety, and the rashness of coping with a friend of His Imperial brother, Louis Nap. His horse meanwhile regales upon grass, regardless of the fast receding field. Thus John is left alone in his glory, and we must be indebted to other sources for an account of the finish of this day's sport.

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CHAPTER LIII.

TWO ACCOUNTS OF A RUN;
OR
LOOK ON THIS PICTURE.



MONSIEUR JEAN ROUGIER having seen the field get small by degrees, if not beautifully less, and having viewed the quivering at the brook, thinking the entertainment over, now dismounted from his wooden steed, and, giving it a crack with his stick, saying it was about as good as his first one, proceeded to perform that sorry exploit of retracing his steps through the country on foot. Thanks to the influence of civilization, there is never much difficulty now in finding a road; and Monsieur was soon in one whose grassy hoof-marked sides showed it had been ridden down in chase. Walking in scarlet is never a very becoming proceeding; but, walking in such a scarlet as Jack had on, coupled with such a cap, procured him but little respect from the country people, who took him for one of those scarlet runners now so common with hounds. One man (a hedger) in answer to his question, "If he had seen his horse?" replied after a good stare—"Nor—nor nobody else;" thinking that the steed was all imaginary, and Jack was wanting to show off: another said, "Coom, coom, that ill not de; you've ne horse." Altogether, Monsieur did not get much politeness from any one; so he stumped moodily along, venting his spleen as he went.

The first thing that attracted his attention was his own

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pumped-out steed, standing with its snaffle-rein thrown over a gate-post; and Jack, having had about enough pedestrian exercise, especially considering that he was walking in his own boots, now gladly availed himself of the lately discarded mount.

"Wooay, ye great grunting brute!" exclaimed he, going up with an air of ownership, taking the rein off the post, and climbing on.

He had scarcely got well under way, ere a clattering of horses' hoofs behind him attracted his attention; and, looking back, he saw the Collington Woods detachment careering along in the usual wild, staring, *which-way? which-way?* sort of style of men, who have been riding to points and have lost the hounds. In the midst of the flight was his master, on the now woe-begone bay; who came coughing, and cutting, and hammer and pincering along in a very ominous sort of way. Billy, on the other hand, flattered himself that they were having a very tremendous run, with very little risk, and he was disposed to take every advantage of his horse, by way of increasing its apparent severity, thinking it would be a fine thing to tell his Mamma how he had got through his horse. Monsieur having replied to their *which ways?* with the comfortable assurance "that they need not trouble themselves any further, the hounds being miles and miles away," there was visible satisfaction on the faces of some; while others, more knowing, attempted to conceal their delight by lip-curling exclamations of "What a bore!" "Thought *you* knew the country, Brown :" "Never follow *you* again, Smith," and so on. They then began asking for the Publics. "Where's the Red Lion?" "Does anybody know the way to the Barley Mow?" "How far is it to the Dog and Duck at Westpool?"

"Dat oss of yours sall not be quite vell, I tink, sare," observed Jack to his master, after listening to one of its ominous coughs.

"Oh, yes he is, only a little lazy," replied Billy, giving him a refresher, as well with the whip on the shoulder, as with the spur on his side.

"He is feeble, I should say, sare," continued Jack, eyeing him pottering along.

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"What should I give him, then?" asked Billy, thinking there might be something in what Jack said.

"I sud say a *leetle* gin vod be de best ting for 'im," replied Jack.

"Gin! but where can I get gin here?" asked Billy.

"Dese gentlemens is asking their vays to de public 'ouses," replied Jack; "and if you follow dem, you vill land at some tap before long.

Jack was right. Balmey Zephyr, as they call Billy West, the surgeon of Hackthorn, who had joined the hunt quite promiscuous, is leading the way to the Red Lion, and the cavalcade is presently before the well-frequented door; one man calling for purl, another ale, a third for porter; while others hank their horses on to the crook at the door, while they go in to make themselves comfortable. Jack dismounting, and giving his horse in charge of his master, entered the little wayside hostelry; and, asking for a measure of gin, and a bottle of water, he drinks off the gin, and then proceeds to rinse Billy's horse's mouth out with the water, just as a training-groom rinses a horse's after a race.

"Dat vill do," at length said Jack, chucking the horse's head up in the air, as if he gets him to swallow the last drop of the precious beverage. "Dat vill do," repeated he, adding, "he vill now carry you 'ome like a larkspur." So saying, Jack handed the bottle back through the window, and, paying the charge, remounted his steed, kissing his hand, and *bounjouring* the party, as he set off with his party in search of Pangburn Park.

Neither of them being great hands at finding their way about a country, they made sundry bad hits, and superfluous deviations, and just reached Pangburn Park as Sir Moses and Co. came triumphantly down Rossington Hill, flourishing the brush that had given them a splendid fifty minutes (ten off for exaggeration) without a check, over the cream of their country, bringing Imperial John, Gameboy Green, and the flower of the Featherbedfordshire hunt, to the most abject and unmitigated grief.



"DAT YILL DO," AT LENGTH SAID JACK.

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"Oh, such a run!" exclaimed Sir Moses, throwing out his paws. "Oh, such a run! Finest run that ever was seen! Sort of run, that if old Thorne (meaning Lord Ladythorne) had had, he'd have talked about it for a year." Sir Moses then descended to particulars, describing the heads up and sterns down work to the brook, the Imperial catastrophe which he dwelt upon with great *goût*, dom'd if he didn't; and how, leaving John in the water, they went away over Rillington Marsh, at a pace that was perfectly appalling, every field choking off some of those Featherbedfordshireites, who came out thinking to cut them all down; then up Tewey Hill, nearly to the crow trees, swinging down again into the vale by Billy Mill, skirting Laureston Plantations, and over those splendid pastures of Arlingford, where there was a momentary check, owing to some coursers, who ought to be hung, dom'd if they shouldn't. "This," continued Sir Moses, "let in some of the laggers, Dickey among the number; but we were speedily away again; and, passing a little to the west of Pickering Park, through the decoy, and away over Larkington Rise, shot down to the Farthingpie House, where that great Owl, Gameboy Green, thinking to show off, rode at an impracticable fence, and got a cropper for his pains, nearly knocking the poor little Damper into the middle of the week after next by crossing him. Well, from there he made for the main earths in Purdoe Banks, where, of course, there was no shelter for him; and, breaking at the east end of the dene, he set his head straight for Bracewell Woods, good two miles off (one and a quarter, say); but his strength failing him over Winterflood Heath, we ran from scent to view, in the finest, openest manner imaginable—"dom'd if we didn't," concluded Sir Moses, having talked himself out of breath.

AND LOOK ON THIS.

THE same evening, just as Oliver Armstrong was shutting up day by trimming and lighting the oil-lamp at the Lockingford toll-bar, which stands within a few yards from where the

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apparently well-behaved little stream of Long Brawlingford brook divides the far-famed Hit-im-and-Hold-im-shire from Featherbedfordshire, a pair of desperately mud-stained cords below a black coat and vest, reined up behind a well wrapped and buttoned-up gentleman in a buggy, who chanced to be passing, and drew forth the usual inquiry of “ What sport ? ”

The questioner was no less a personage than Mr. Easylease, Lord Ladythorne’s agent—we beg pardon, Commissioner—and Mr. Gameboy Green, the tenant in possession of the soiled cords, recognising the voice in spite of the wraps, thus replied—

“ Oh, Mr. Easylease, it’s you, sir, is it ? Hope you’re well, sir,” with a sort of move of his hat—not a take off, nor yet a keep on—“ hope Mrs. Easylease is quite well, and the young ladies.”

“ Quite well, thank you ; hope Mrs. G.’s the same. What sport have you had ? ” added the Commissioner, without waiting for an answer to the inquiry about the ladies.

“ Sport ! ” repeated Gameboy, drawing his breath, as he conned the matter hastily over. “ Sport ! ” recollecting he was as good as addressing the Earl himself—master of hounds—favours past—hopes for future, and so on. “ Well,” said he, seeing his line, “ we’ve had a nice-ish run—a fair-ish day—five-and-twenty-minutes, or so.”

“ Fast ? ” asked Mr. Easylease, twirling his gig-whip about, for he was going to Tantivy Castle in the morning, and thought he might as well have something to talk about besides the weather.

“ Middlin’—nothin’ particklar,” replied Green, with a chuck of the chin.

“ Kill ? ” asked the Commissioner, continuing the laconics.

“ Don’t know,” replied the naughty Green, who knew full well they had ; for he had seen them run into their fox as he stood on Dinglebank Hill ; and, moreover, had ridden part of the way home with Tommy Heslop, who had a pad.

“ Why, you’ve been down ! ” exclaimed the Commissioner, starting round at the unwonted announcement of Gameboy Green, the best man of their hunt, not knowing if they had killed.

“ Down, aye,” replied Gameboy, looking at his soiled side, which looked as if he had been at a sculptor’s, having a mud

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cast taken of himself. "I'm indebted to the nasty little jealous Damper for that."

"The Damper!" exclaimed the Commissioner, knowing how the Earl hated him. "The Damper! that little rascally draper's always doing something wrong. How did he manage it?"

"Just charged me as I was taking a fence," replied Green, "and knocked me clean over."

"What a shame!" exclaimed the Commissioner, driving on. "What a shame," repeated he, whipping his horse into a trot.

And as he proceeded, he presently fell in with Dr. Pillerton, to whom he related how infamously the Hit-im-and-Hold-im-shire chaps had used poor Green, breaking three of his ribs, and nearly knocking his eye out. And Dr. Pillerton, ever anxious, &c., told D'Orsay Davis, the great we of the Feather-bedfordshire Gazette, who forthwith penned such an article on fox-hunting Jealousy, generally, and Hit-im-and-Hold-im-shire Jealousy in particular, as caused Sir Moses to declare he'd horsewhip him the first time he caught him—"dom'd if he wouldn't."

ASK MAMMA.

CHAPTER LIV.

THE SICK HORSE AND THE SICK MASTER



“OUR ‘oss sall be seek—down in de mouth dis mornin’, sare,” observed Monsieur to Billy, as the latter lay tossing about in his uncomfortable bed, thinking how he could shirk that day’s hunting penance; Sir Moses, with his usual dexterity, having evaded the offer of lending him a horse, by saying that Billy’s having had nothing to do the day before would be quite fresh for the morrow.

“Shall be w-h-a-w-t?” drawled our hero, dreading the reply.

“Down in de mouth—seek—onvell,” replied Jack, depositing the top-boots by the sofa, and placing the shaving-water on the toilette table.

“Oh, is he!” said Billy, perking up, thinking he saw his way out of the dilemma. “What’s the matter with him?”

“He coughs, sare—he does not feed, sare—and altogether he is not right.”

“So-o-o,” said Billy, conning the matter over—“then p’r’aps I’d better not ride him?”

“Vot you think right, sare,” replied Jack. “He is your quadruped, not mine; but I should not say he is vot dey call, op to snoff—fit to go.”

“Ah,” replied Billy. “I’ll not ride ’im!—hate a horse that’s not up to the mark.”

“Sare Moses Baronet vod perhaps lend you von, sare,” suggested Jack.

“Oh, by no means!” replied Billy in a fright. “By no

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means! I'd just as soon not hunt to-day, in fact, for I've got a good many letters to write and things to do; so just take the water away for the present and bring it back when Sir Moses is gone." So saying, Billy turned over on his thin pillow, and again sought the solace of his couch. He presently fell into a delightful dreamy sort of sleep, in which he fancied that after dancing the Yammerton girls all round, he had at length settled into an interminable "Ask Mamma Polka," with Clara, from which he was disagreeably aroused by Jack Rogers's hirsute face again protruding between the partially-drawn curtains, announcing, "Sare Moses Baronet, sare, has cot his stick—is off."

"Sir Moses, *what!*!" started Billy, dreading to hear about the hunt.

"Sare Moses Baronet, sare, is gone, and I've brought you your *l'eau chaude*, as you said."

"All right!" exclaimed Billy, rubbing his eyes and recollecting himself, "all right;" and, banishing the beauty, he jumped out of bed and resigned himself to Rogers, who forthwith commenced the elaborate duties of his office. As it progressed he informed Billy how the land lay. "Sare Moses was gone, bot Cuddy vas left, and Mrs. Margerum said there should be no *déjeuner* for Cod" (who was a bad tip), till Billy came down. And Jack didn't put himself at all out of his way to expedite matters to accommodate Cuddy.

At length Billy descended in a suit of those tigerish tweeds into which he had lapsed since he got away from Mamma, and was received with a round of tallihos and view-holloas by Cuddy, who had been studying *Bell's Life* with exemplary patience in the little bookless library, reading through all the meets of the hounds as if he was going to send a horse to each of them. Then Cuddy took his revenge on the servants by ringing for everything he could think of, demanding them all in the name of Mr. Pringle; just as an old parish constable used to run frantically about a fair demanding assistance from everybody in the name of the Queen. Mr. Pringle wanted devilled turkey, Mr. Pringle

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wanted partridge pie, Mr. Pringle wanted sausages, Mr. Pringle wanted chocolate, Mr. Pringle wanted honey, jelly, and preserve. Why the deuce didn't they send Mr. Pringle his breakfast in properly? And if the servants didn't think Billy a very great man, it wasn't for want of Cuddy trying to make them.

And so, what with Cuddy's exertions and the natural course of events, Billy obtained a very good breakfast. The last cup being at length drained, Cuddy clutched *Bell's Life*, and wheeling his semicircular chair round to the fire, dived into his side pocket, and, producing a cigar-case, tendered Billy a weed. And Cuddy did it in such a matter-of-course way, that much as Billy disliked smoking, he felt constrained to accept one, thinking to get rid of it by a sidewind, just as he had got rid of old Wotherspoon's snuff, by throwing it away. So, taking his choice, he lit it, and prepared to beat a retreat, but was interrupted by Cuddy asking where "he was going ? "

"Only into the open air," replied Billy, with the manner of a professed smoker.

"Open air, be hanged!" retorted Cuddy. "Open air's well enough in summer-time when the roses are out, and the strawberries ripe, but this is not the season for that kind of sport. No, no, come and sit here, man," continued he, drawing a chair alongside of him for Billy, "and let's have a chat about hunting."

"But Sir Moses won't like his room smoked in," observed Billy, making a last effort to be off.

"Oh, Sir Moses don't care!" rejoined Cuddy, with a jerk of his head; "Sir Moses don't care! can't hurt such rubbish as this," added he, tapping the arm of an old imitation rosewood painted chair that stood on his left. "No old furniture broker in the Cut would give ten puns for the whole lot, curtains, cushions, and all," looking at the faded red hangings around.

So Billy was obliged to sit down and proceed with his cigar. Meanwhile Cuddy having established a good light to his own, took up his left leg to nurse, and proceeded with his sporting speculations.

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" Ah, hunting wasn't what it used to be (whiff), nor racing either (puff). Never was a truer letter (puff), than that of Lord Derby's (whiff), in which he said racing had got into the (puff) hands of (whiff) persons of an inferior (puff) position, who keep (puff) horses as mere instruments of (puff) gambling, instead of for (whiff) sport." Then, having pruned the end of his cigar, he lowered his left leg, and gave his right one a turn, while he indulged in some hunting recollections. " Hunting wasn't what it used to be (puff) in the days of old (whiff) Warde and (puff) Villebois and (whiff) Masters. Ah, no ! " continued he, taking his cigar out of his mouth, and casting his eye up at the dirty fly-dotted ceiling. " Few such sportsmen as poor Sutton or Ralph Lambton, or that fine old fire-brick, Assheton Smith. People want to be all in the ring now, instead of sticking to one sport, and enjoying it thoroughly—yachts, manors, moors, race-horses, cricket, coaches, coursing, cooks—and the consequence is, they get blown before they are thirty, and have to live upon air the rest of their lives. Wasn't one man in fifty that hunted who really enjoyed it. See how glad they were to tail off as soon as they could. A good knock on the nose, or a crack on the crown settled half of them. Another thing was, there was no money to be made by it. Nothing an Englishman liked so much as making money, or trying to make it." So saying, Cuddy gave his cigar another fillip, and replacing it in his mouth, proceeded to blow a series of long revolving clouds, as he lapsed into a heaven of hunting contemplations.

From these he was suddenly aroused by the violent retching of Billy. Our friend, after experiencing the gradual growth of sea-sickness mingled with a stupefying headache, was at length fairly overcome, and Cuddy had just time to bring the slop-basin to the rescue. Oh, how green Billy looked !

* * * * *

" Too soon after breakfast—too soon after breakfast," muttered Cuddy, disgusted at the interruption. " Lie down

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for half an hour, lie down for half an hour," continued he, ringing the bell violently for assistance.

"Send Mr. Pringle's valet here! send Mr. Pringle's valet here!" exclaimed he, as the half-davered footman came staring in, followed by the ticket-of-leave butler. "Here, Monsieur!" continued he, as Rougier's hairy face now peeped past the door, "your master wants you—eaten something that's disagreed with him—that partridge-pie, I think, for I feel rather squeamish myself; and you, Bankhead," added he, addressing the butler, "just bring us each a drop of brandy, not that nasty brown stuff Mother Margerum puts into the puddings, but some of the white, you know—the best, you know," saying which, with a "Now, old boy!" he gave Billy a hoist from his seat by the arm, and sent him away with his servant. The brandy, however, never came, Bankhead declaring they had drunk all he had out, the other night. So Cuddy was obliged to console himself with his cigars and *Bell's Life*, which latter he read, marked, learnt, and inwardly digested, pausing every now and then at the speculative passages, wondering whether Wilkinson and Kidd, or Messrs. Wilkinson and Co. were the parties who had the honour of having his name on their books; where Henry Just, the backer of horses, got the Latin for his advertisement from, and considering whether Nena Sahib, the Indian fiend, should be roasted alive or carried round the world in a cage. He also went through the column and a quarter of the meets of hounds again, studied the doings at Copenhagen Grounds, Salford Borough Gardens, and Hornsea Wood, and finally finished off with the time of high-water at London Bridge, and the list of pedestrian matches to come. He then folded the paper carefully up and replaced it in his pocket, feeling equal to a dialogue with anybody. Having examined the day through the window, he next strolled to his old friend the weather-glass at the bottom of the stairs, and then constituting himself huntsman to a pack of hounds, proceeded to draw the house for our Billy. "Y-o-o-icks, wind 'im! y-o-o-icks, push him up!" holloaed he, going leisurely upstairs. "E'leu in there! E'leu

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in!" continued he, on arriving at a partially closed door on the first landing.

"*There's nobody here! There's nobody here!*" exclaimed Mrs. Margerum, hurrying out. "There's nobody here, sir!" repeated she, holding steadily on by the door, to prevent any one entering where she was busy packing her weekly basket of perquisites, or what the Americans more properly call "*stealings*."

"Nobody here! bitch-fox, at all events!" retorted Cuddy, eyeing her confusion — "Where's Mr. Pringle's room?" asked he.

"I'll show you, sir; I'll show you," replied she, closing the room-door, and hurrying on to another one further along. "This is Mr. Pringle's room, sir," said she, stopping before it.

. "All right!" exclaimed Cuddy, knocking at the door.

"Come in," replied a feeble voice from within; and in Cuddy went.

There was Billy in bed, with much such a disconsolate face as he has at page 17, when Jack Rogers appears with his hunting things. As, however, nobody ever admits being sick with smoking, Billy readily adopted Cuddy's suggestion, and laid the blame on the pie. Cuddy, indeed, was good enough to say he had been sick himself, and of course Billy had a right to be so, too. "Shouldn't have been so," said Cuddy, "if that beggar Bankhead had brought the brandy, but there's no getting anything out of that fellow." And Cuddy and Billy being then placed upon terms of equality, the interesting invalids agreed to have a walk together. To this end Billy turned out of bed and re-established himself in his recently-discarded coat and vest; feeling much like a man after a bad passage from Dover to Calais. The two then toddled down-stairs together, Cuddy stopping at the bottom of the flight to consult his old friend the glass, and speculate upon the weather.

"Dash it! but it's falling," said he, with a shake of the head, after tapping it. "Didn't like the looks of the sky this

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morning—wish there mayn’t be a storm brewing. Had one just about this time last year. Would be a horrid bore if hunting was stopped just in its prime,” and talked like a man with half-a-dozen horses fit to jump out of their skins, instead of not owning one. And Billy thought it would be the very thing for him if hunting was stopped. With a somewhat light heart, he followed Cuddy through the back slums to the stables.

“Sir Moses doesn’t sacrifice much to appearances, does he ?” asked Cuddy, pointing to the wretched rough cast peeling off the back walls of the house, which were greened with the drippings of the broken spouts.

“No,” replied Billy, staring about, thinking how different things looked there to what they did at the Carstle.

“Desperately afraid of paint,” continued Cuddy, looking about. “Don’t think there has been a lick of paint laid upon any place since he got it. Always tell him he’s like a bad tenant at the end of a long lease,” which observation brought them to the first stable-door. “Who’s here ?” cried Cuddy, kicking at the locked entrance.

“Who’s there ?” demanded a voice from within.

“Me ! Mr. Flintoff !” replied Cuddy, in a tone of authority. “Open the door !” added he, imperiously.

The dirty-shirted helper had seen them coming ; but the servants generally looking upon Cuddy as a spy, the man had locked the door upon him.

“Beg pardon, sir,” now said the Catiff, pulling at his cow-lick as he opened it ; “beg pardon, sir, didn’t know it was you.”

“ Didn’t you ?” replied Cuddy, adding, “you might have known by my knock,” saying which Cuddy stuck his cheesy hat down on his nose, and, pocketing his hands, proceeded to scrutinise the stud.

“What’s this ‘orse got a bandage on for ?” asked he about one. “Why don’t ye let that ‘orse’s ‘ead down ?” demanded he of another. “Strip this ‘orse,” ordered he of a third. Then Cuddy stood criticising his points, his legs, his loins, his hocks,

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his head, his steep shoulder, as he called it, and then ordered the clothes to be put on again. So he went from stable to stable, just as he does at Tattersall's on a Sunday, Cuddy being as true to the "corner" as the needle to the pole, though, like the children, he looks, but *never* touches, that is to say, "bids," at least not for himself. Our Billy, soon tiring of this amusement—if, indeed, amusement it can be called—availed himself of the interregnum caused by the outside passage from one set of stables to another, to slip away to look after his own horse, of whose health he suddenly remembered Rougier had spoken disparagingly in the morning. After some little trouble he found the Juniper-smelling head-groom, snoring asleep among a heap of horse-cloths before the fire in the saddle-room.

It is said that a man who is never exactly sober is never quite drunk, and Jack Wetun was one of this order. He was always running to the "unsophisticated gin-bottle," keeping up the steam of excitement, but seldom overtopping it, and could shake himself into apparent sobriety in an instant. Like most of Sir Moses' people, he was one of the fallen angels of servitude, having lived in high places, from which his intemperate habits had ejected him; and he was now gradually descending to that last refuge of the destitute, the Ostlership of a farmer's inn. Starting out of his nest at the rousing shake of the helper, who holloaed in his ear that "Mr. Pringle wanted to see his 'orse," Wetun stretched his brawny arms, and, rubbing his eyes, at length comprehended Billy, when he exclaimed with a start, "'Oss, sir? Oh, by all means, sir;" and, bundling on his greasy-collared, iron-grey coat, he reeled and rolled out of the room, followed by our friend. "That (hiccup) 'oss of (hiccup) yours is (hiccup) amiss, I think (hiccup), sir," said he, leading, or rather lurching the way. "A w-h-a-w-t?" drawled Billy, watching Wetun's tack and half-tack gait.

"Amiss (hiccup)—unwell—don't like his (hiccup) looks," replied the groom, rolling past the stable-door where he was. "Oh, beg pardon," exclaimed he, bumping against Billy on turning short back, as he suddenly recollected himself; "Beg

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pardon, he's in here," added he, fumbling at the door. It was locked. Then, oh dear, he hadn't got the (hiccup) key, then (hiccup), yes, he had got the (hiccup) key, as he recollects he had his coat on, and dived into the pocket for it. Then he produced it; and, after making several unsuccessful pokes at the key-hole, at length accomplished an entry, and Billy again saw Napoleon the Great, now standing in the promised two-stalled stable along with Sir Moses' gig mare.

To a man with any knowledge of horses, Napoleon certainly did look very much amiss—more like a wooden horse at a harness-maker's, than an animal meant to go—stiff, with his fore-legs abroad, and an anxious care-worn countenance continually cast back at its bearing flanks.

"Humph!" said Billy, looking him over, as he thought, very knowingly. "Not so much amiss, either, is he?"

"Well, sir, what you think," replied Wetun, glad to find that Billy didn't blame him for his bad night's lodgings.

"Oh, I daresay he'll be all right in a day or two," observed Billy, half inclined to recommend his having his feet put into warm water.

"Ope so," replied Wetun, looking up the horse's red nostrils, adding, "but he's not (hiccup) now, somehow."

Just then a long reverberating crack sounded through the court-yard, followed by the clattering of horses' hoofs, and Wetun exclaiming, "*Here be Sir Moses!*" dropped the poor horse's head, and hurried out to meet his master, accompanied by Billy.

"Ah, Pringle!" exclaimed Sir Moses, gaily throwing his leg over his horse's head as he alighted; "Ah, Pringle, my dear fellow, what's got you?"

"Well, what sport?" demanded Cuddy Flintoff, rushing up with eager anxiety depicted on his face

"Very good," replied Sir Moses, stamping the mud off his boots, and then giving himself a general shake; "very good," repeated he; "found at Lobjolt Gorse—ran up the banks and down the banks, and across to Beatie's Bog, then over to Deepwell Rocks, and back again to the banks."

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"*Did you kill?*?" demanded Cuddy, not wanting to hear any more about the banks—up the banks or down the banks either.

"Why, no," replied Sir Moses, moodily; "if that dom'd old Daddy Nevins hadn't stuck his ugly old mug right in the way, we should have forced him over Willowesike Pastures, and doubled him up in no time, for we were close upon him; whereas the old infidel brought us to a check, and we never could get upon terms with him again; but, come," continued Sir Moses, wishing to cut short this part of the narrative, "let's go into the house and get ourselves warmed, for the air's cold, and I haven't had a bite since breakfast."

"Ay, come in!" cried Cuddy, leading the way; "come in, and get Mr. Pringle a drop of brandy, for he's eaten something that's disagreed with him."

"Eaten something that's disagreed with him? Sorry to hear that; what could it be?—what could it be?" asked Sir Moses, as the party now groped their way along the back passages.

"Why, I blame the partridge-pie," replied Cuddy, demurely.

"Not a bit of it!" rejoined Sir Moses—"not a bit of it! eat some myself—eat some myself—will finish it now—will finish it now."

"We've saved you that trouble," replied Cuddy, "for we finished it ourselves."

"The deuce you did!" exclaimed Sir Moses, adding, "and were *you* sick?"

"Squeamish," replied Cuddy—"squeamish; not so bad as Mr. Pringle."

"But bad enough to want some brandy, I suppose," observed the Baronet, now entering the library.

"Quite so," said Cuddy—"quite."

"Why didn't you get some?—why didn't you get some?" asked the Baronet, moving towards the bell.

"Because Bankhead has none out," replied Mr. Cuddy, before Sir Moses rang.

"None out!" retorted Sir Moses—"none out!—what! have you finished that, too!"

"Somebody has, it seems," replied Cuddy, quite innocently.

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"Well, then, I'll tell you what you must do—I'll tell you what you must do," continued the Baronet, lighting a little red taper, and feeling in his pocket for the keys—"you must go into the cellar yourself and get some—go into the cellar yourself and get some;" so saying, Sir Moses handed Cuddy the candle and keys, saying, "shelf above the left hand bin behind the door," adding, "you know it—you know it."

"Better bring two when I'm there, hadn't I?" asked Cuddy.

"Well," said Sir Moses, drily, "I s'pose there'll be no great harm if you do;" and away Cuddy went.

"D-e-e-a-vil of a fellow to drink—d-e-e-a-vil of a fellow to drink," drawled Sir Moses, listening to his receding footsteps along the passage. He then directed his blarney to Billy. "Oh dear, he was sorry to hear he'd been ill; what could it be? Lost a nice gallop, too—dom'd if he hadn't. Couldn't be the pie! Wondered he wasn't down in the morning." Then Billy explained that his horse was ill, and that prevented him.

"Horse ill!" exclaimed Sir Moses, throwing out his hands, and raising his brows with astonishment—"horse ill! Oh, dear, but that shouldn't have stopped you, if I'd known—should have been most welcome to any of mine—dom'd if you shouldn't! There's Pegasus, or Atalanta, or Will-o'-the-Wisp, or any of them, fit to go. Oh, dear, it was a sad mistake not sending word. Wonder what Wetun was about not to tell me—would row him for not doing so," and as Sir Moses went on protesting and professing and proposing, Cuddy Flintoff's footstep and "*for-rard on! for-rard on!*" were heard returning along the passage, and he presently entered with a bottle in each hand.

"There are a brace of beauties!" exclaimed he, placing them on the round table, with the dew of the cellar fresh on their sides—"there are a brace of blood-like beauties!" repeated he, eyeing their neat tapering necks, "the very race-horse of bottles—perfect pictures, I declare; so different to those great lumbering round-shouldered English things, that look like black beer or porter, or something of that sort." Then Cuddy ran off for glasses and tumblers and water; and Sir Moses, having

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taken a thimbleful of brandy, retired to change his clothes, declaring he felt chilly ; and Cuddy, reigning in his stead, made Billy two such uncommonly strong brews, that we are sorry to say he had to be put to bed shortly after.

And when Mr. Bankhead heard that Cuddy Flintoff had been sent to the cellar instead of him, he declared it was the greatest insult that had ever been offered to a gentleman of his "order," and vowed that he would turn his master off the first thing in the morning.

ASK MAMMA.

CHAPTER LV.

A NON-HUNTING DAY.



EXT day being a “dies non” in the hunting way, Sir Moses Mainchance lay at earth to receive his steward Mr. Mordecai Nathan, and hear what sport he had had as well in hunting up arrears of rent as in the management of the Pangburn Park estate generally.

Very sorry the accounts were, many of the apparent dullard farmers being far more than a match for the sharp London Jew. Mr. Mordecai Nathan, indeed, declared that it would require a detective policeman to watch each farm, so tricky and subtile were the occupants. And as Sir Moses listened to the sad recitals, how Henerey Brown & Co. had been leading off their straw by night, and Mrs. Turnbull selling her hay by day, and Jacky Hindmarch sowing his fallows without ever taking out a single weed, he vowed that they were a set of the biggest rogues under the sun, and deserved to be hung all in a row—dom’d if they didn’t! And he moved and seconded and carried a resolution in his own mind, that the man who meddled with land as a source of revenue was a very great goose. So, charging Mr. Mordecai Nathan to stick to them for the money, promising him one per cent. more (making him eleven) on what he recovered, he at length dissolved the meeting, most heartily wishing he had Pangburn Park in his pocket again. Meanwhile Messrs. Flintoff and Pringle had yawned away the morning in the usual dreamy, loungy style of guests in country houses, where the meals are the chief incidents of the day. Mr. Pringle not choosing to be tempted with any more “pie,”

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had slipped away to the stable as soon as Cuddy produced the dread cigar-case after breakfast, and there had a conference with Mr. Wetun, the stud-groom, about his horse Napoleon the Great. The drunkard half laughed when Billy asked "if he thought the horse would be fit to come out in the morning, observing that he thought it would be a good many mornin's fust, adding that Mr. Fleams the farrier had bled him, but he didn't seem any better, and that he was coming back at two o'clock, when p'r'aps Mr. Pringle had better see him himself." Whereupon our friend Billy, recollecting Sir Moses' earnest deprecation of his having stayed at home for want of a horse the day before, and the liberal way he had talked of Atalanta and Pegasus, and he didn't know what else, now charged Mr. Wetun not to mention his being without a horse, lest Sir Moses might think it necessary to mount him; which promise being duly accorded, Billy, still shirking Cuddy, sought the retirement of his chamber, where he indited an epistle to his anxious Mamma, telling her all, how he had left Major Yammerton's and the dangerous eyes, and had taken up his quarters with Sir Moses Mainchance, a great fox-hunting Hit-im-and-Hold-im-shire Baronet at Pangburn Park, expecting she would be very much pleased and struck with the increased consequence. Instead of which, however, though Mrs. Pringle felt that he had perhaps hit upon the lesser evil, she wrote him a very loving letter by return of post, saying she was glad to hear he was enjoying himself, but cautioning him against "Moses Mainchance" (omitting the Sir), adding that every man's character was ticketed in London, and the letters "D. D." for "Dirty Dog" were appended to his. She also told him that Uncle Jerry had been inquiring about him, and begging she would call upon him at an early day on matters of business, all of which will hereafter "more full and at large appear," as the lawyers say; meanwhile, we must back the train of ideas a little to our hero. Just as he was affixing the great seal of state to the letter, Cuddy Flintoff's "for-rard on! for-rard on!" was heard progressing along the passage, followed by a noisy knock, with an exclamation of "Pringle!" at our friend's door.

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"Come in!" cried he; and in obedience to the invitation, Flintoff stood in the doorway.

"Don't forget," said he, "that we dine at Hinton to-day, and the Baronet's ordered the trap at four," adding, "I'm going to dress, and you'd better do the same." So saying, Cuddy closed the door, and hunted himself along to his own room at the end of the passage—"E'leu in there! E'leu in!" cried he as he got to the door.

ASK MAMMA.

CHAPTER LVI.

THE FOX AND HOUNDS HOTEL AT HINTON.



INTON, once the second town in Hit-im and Hold-im shire, stands at the confluence of the Long Brawlingford and Riplington brooks, whose united efforts here succeed in making a pretty respectable stream. It is an old-fashioned country place, whose component parts may be described as consisting of an extensive market-place, with a massive church of the florid Gothic, or gingerbread order of architecture at one end, a quaint stone-roofed, stone-pillared market cross at the other, the Fox and Hounds hotel and posting-house on the north side, with alternating shops and public-houses on the south.

Its population, according to a certain “sore subject” topographical dictionary, was 23,500, whilst its principal trade might have been described as “fleecing the foxhunters.” That was in its golden days, when Lord Martingal hunted the country, holding his Court at the Fox and Hounds hotel, where gentlemen stayed with their studs for months and months together, instead of whisking about with their horses by steam. Then every stable in the town was occupied at very remunerative rents, and the inhabitants seemed to think they could never build enough.

Like the natives of most isolated places, the Hintonites were very self-sufficient, firmly believing that there were no such conjurers as themselves; and, when the Crumpletin railway was projected, they resolved that it would ruin their town, and so they opposed it to a man, and succeeded in driving it several



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miles off, thus scattering their trade among other places along the line. Year by year the bonnet and mantle shops grew less gay, the ribbons less attractive, until shop after shop lapsed into a sort of store, hardware on one side, and millinery, perhaps, on the other. But the greatest fall of all was that of the Fox and Hounds hotel and posting-house. This spacious hostelry had apparently been built with a view of accommodating everybody; and, at the time of our story, it loomed in deserted grandeur in the great grass-grown market-place. In structure it was more like a continental inn than an English one; quadrangular, entered by a spacious archway, from whose lofty ceiling hung the crooks, from whence used to dangle the glorious legs and loins of four-year-old mutton, the home-fed hams, the geese, the ducks, the game, with not unfrequently a haunch or two of presentation venison. With the building, however, the similarity ended, the cobble-stoned court-yard displaying only a few water-casks and a basket-caged jay, in lieu of the statues, and vases, and fountains and flower-stands that grace the flagged courts of the continent. But in former days it boasted that which in the eye of our inn-keeper passes show, namely, a goodly line of two-horse carriages drawn across its ample width. In those days county families moved like county families, in great caravan-like carriages, with plenty of servants, who, having drunk the Park or Hall allowance, upheld their characters and the honour of their houses, by topping up the measure of intemperance with their own money. Their masters and mistresses, too, considered the claims of the inn-keepers, and ate and drank for the good of the house, instead of sneaking away to pastry-cooks for their lunches at a third of the price of the inn ones. Not that any landlord had ever made money at the Fox and Hounds hotel. Oh, no! it would never do to admit that. Indeed, Mr. Binny used to declare, if it wasn't "the great regard he had for Lord Martingal and the gents of his hunt, he'd just as soon be without their custom;" just as all Binneys decry, whatever they have—military messes, hunt messes, bar messes, any sort of messes. They never make anything by them—not they.

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Now, however, that the hunt was irrevocably gone, words were inadequate to convey old Peter the waiter's lamentations at its loss. "Oh dear, sir!" he would say, as he showed a stranger the club-room, once the eighth wonder of the world, "Oh dear, sir! I never thought to see things come to this pass. This room, sir, used to be occupied night after night, and every Wednesday we had more company than it could possibly hold. Now we have nothing but a miserable three-and-sixpence a head once a month, with Sir Moses in the chair, and a shilling a bottle for corkage. Formerly we had six shillings a bottle for port and five for sherry, which, as our decanters didn't hold three parts, was pretty good pay." Then Peter would open the shutters and show the proportions of the room, with the unrivalled pictures on the walls: Lord Martingal on his horse, Lord Martingal off his horse; Mr. Customer on his horse, Mr. Customer off his horse, Mr. Customer getting drunk; Mr. Crasher on his horse, Mr. Crasher with a hound, &c., all in the old woodeny style that prevailed before the gallant Grant struck out a fresh light in his inimitable "Breakfast," and "Meet of the Stag-hounds." But the reader will perhaps accompany us to one of Sir Moses' "Wednesday evenings;" for which purpose they will have the goodness to suppose the Baronet and Mr. Flintoff arrayed in the dress uniform of the hunt—viz. scarlet coats with yellow collars and facings, and Mr. Pringle attired in the height of the fashion, bundling into one of those extraordinary-shaped vehicles that modern times have introduced. "*Right!*" cries the footman from the steps of the door, as Bankhead and Monsieur mount the box of the carriage, and away the well-muffled-up party drive to the scene of action.

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CHAPTER LVII.

MR. PRINGLE SUDDENLY BECOMES A MEMBER OF THE
HIT-IM AND HOLD-IM SHIRE HUNT.



HE great draw-back to the Hit-im and Hold-im shire hunt club room at the Fox and Hounds hotel and posting-house at Hinton, undoubtedly was, that there was no ante or reception room. The guests on alighting from their vehicles, after ascending the broad straight flight of stairs, found themselves suddenly precipitated into the dazzling dining-room, with such dismantling accommodation only as a low screen before the door at the low end of the room afforded. The effect therefore was much the same as if an actor dressed for his part on the stage before the audience; a fox-hunter in his wraps, and a fox-hunter in his red, being very distinct and different beings. It was quite destructive of anything like imposing flourish or effect. Moreover the accumulation of steaming things on a wet night, which it generally was on a club dinner, added but little to the fragrance of the room. So much for generalities; we will now proceed to our particular dinner.

Sir Moses being the great gun of the evening, of course timed himself to arrive becomingly late—indeed the venerable post-boy who drove him, knew to a moment when to arrive; and as the party ascended the straight flight of stairs they met a general buzz of conversation coming down, high above which rose the discordant notes of the Laughing Hyæna. It was the first hunt dinner of the season, and being the one at which Sir Moses generally broached his sporting requirements, parties



THE HIT-IM AND HOLD-IM SHIRE HUNT.

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thought it prudent to be present, as well to hear the prospects of the season as to protect their own pockets. To this end some twenty or five-and-twenty variegated guests were assembled, the majority dressed in the red coat and yellow facings of the hunt, exhibiting every variety of cut, from the tight short-waisted swallow-tails of Mr. Crashier's (the contemporary of George the Fourth) reign, down to the sack-like garment of the present day. Many of them looked as if, having got into their coats, they were never to get out of them again, but as pride feels no pain, if asked about them, they would have declared they were quite comfortable. The dark-coated gentry were principally farmers and tradespeople, or the representatives of great men in the neighbourhood. Mr. Buckwheat, Mr. Doubledrill, Mr. James Corduroys, Mr. Stephen Broadfurrow, Mr. Pica, of the "Hit-im and Hold-im shire Herald," Hicks, the Flying Hatter, and his shadow Tom Snowdon the draper or Damper, Manford the corn-merchant, Smith the saddler. Then there was Mr. Mossman, Lord Polkaton's Scotch factor, Mr. Squeezeley, Sir Morgan Wildair's agent, Mr. Lute on behalf of Lord Harpsichord, Mr. Stiff representing Sir George Persiflage, &c., &c. These latter were watching the proceedings for their employers, Sir Moses having declared that Mr. Mossman on a former occasion (see page 262 in the first volume), had volunteered to subscribe fifty pounds to the hounds, on behalf of Lord Polkaton, and Sir Moses had made his lordship pay it too—"dom'd if he hadn't." With this sketch of the company, let us now proceed to the entry.

Though the current of conversation had been anything but flattering to our master before his arrival, yet the reception they now gave him, as he emerged from behind the screen, might have made a less self-sufficient man than Sir Moses think he was extremely popular. Indeed they rushed at him in a way that none but Briareus himself could have satisfied. They all wanted to hug him at once. Sir Moses having at length appeased their enthusiasm, and given his beak a good blow, proceeded to turn part of their politeness upon Billy, by introducing him to those around. Mr. Pringle, Mr. Jarperson

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—Mr. Pringle, Mr. Paul Straddler—Mr. Pringle, Mr. John Bullrush, and so on.

Meanwhile Cuddy Flintoff kept up a series of view holloas and hunting noises, as guest after guest claimed the loan of his hand for a shake. So they were all very hearty and joyful as members of a fox-hunting club ought to be.

The rules of the Hit-im and Hold-im shire hunt, like those of many other hunts and institutions, were sometimes very stringent, and sometimes very lax—very stringent when an objectionable candidate presented himself—very lax when a good one was to be obtained. On the present occasion Sir Moses Mainchance had little difficulty in persuading the meeting to suspend the salutary rule (No. 5) requiring each new candidate to be proposed and seconded at one meeting, and his name placed above the mantel-piece in the club-room, until he was balloted for at another meeting, in favour of the nephew of his old friend and brother Baronet, Sir Jonathan Pringle; whom he described as a most promising young sportsman, and likely to make a most valuable addition to their hunt. And the members all seeing matters in that light, Cuddy Flintoff was despatched for the ballot-box, so that there might be no interruption to the advancement of dinner by summoning Peter. Meanwhile Sir Moses resumed the introductory process, Mr. Heslop Mr. Pringle, Mr. Pringle Mr. Smoothley, Mr. Drew Mr. Pringle, helping Billy to the names of such faces as he could not identify for want of their hunting caps. Cleverer fellows than Billy are puzzled to do that sometimes.

Presently Mr. Flintoff returned with the rat-trap-like ballot-box under his arm, and a willow-pattern soup-plate with some beans in the bottom of it, in his hand.

“ Make way ! ” cried he, “ make way ! ” advancing up the room with all the dignity of a mace-bearer. “ Where will you have it, Sir Moses ? ” asked he, “ where will you have it, Sir Moses ? ”

“ Here ! ” replied the Baronet, seizing a card-table from below the portrait of Mr. Customer getting drunk, and setting it out a little on the left of the fire. The ballot-box was then

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duly deposited on the centre of the green baize with a composite candle on each side of it.

Sir Moses, then thinking to make up in dignity what he had sacrificed to expediency, now called upon the meeting to appoint a scrutineer on behalf of the club, and parties caring little who they named so long as they were not kept waiting for dinner, holloaed out “Mr. Flintoff!” whereupon Sir Moses put it to them if they were all content to have Mr. Flintoff appointed to the important and responsible office of scrutineer, and receiving a shower of “yes-es!” in reply, he declared Mr. Flintoff was duly elected, and requested him to enter upon the duties of his office.

Cuddy, then turning up his red coat wrists, so that there might be no suspicion of concealed beans, proceeded to open and turn the drawers of the ballot-box upside down, in order to show that they were equally clear, and then restoring them below their “Yes” and “No” holes, he took his station behind the table with the soup-plate in his hand, ready to drop a bean into each member’s hand as he advanced to receive it. Mr. Heslop presently led the way at a dead-march-in-Saul-sort of pace, and other members falling in behind like railway passengers at a pay place, there was a continuous dropping of beans for some minutes, a solemn silence being preserved as if the parties expected to hear on which side they fell.

At length the constituency was exhausted, and Mr. Flintoff having assumed the sand-glass, and duly proclaimed that he should close the ballot, if no member appeared before the first glass was out, speedily declared it was run, when, laying it aside, he emptied the soup-plate of the remaining beans, and after turning it upside down, to show the perfect fairness of the transaction, handed it to Sir Moses to hold for the result. Drawing out the “Yes” drawer first, he proceeded with great gravity to count the beans out into the soup-plate—one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, and so on, up to eighteen, when the inverted drawer proclaimed they were done.

“Eighteen Ayes,” announced Sir Moses to the meeting, amid a murmur of applause.

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Mr. Flintoff then produced the dread “No,” or black-ball drawer, whereof one to ten white excluded, and turning it upside down, announced, in a tone of triumph, “NONE ! ”

“ Hooray ! ” cried Sir Moses, seizing our hero by both hands, and hugging him heartily—“ Hooray ! give you joy, my boy ! you’re a member of the first club in the world ! The Caledonian’s nothing to it ! —dom’d if it is.” So saying, he again swung him severely by the arms, and then handed him over to the meeting.

And thus Mr. Pringle was elected a member of the Hit-im and Hold-im shire hunt, without an opportunity of asking his Mamma, for the best of all reasons, that Sir Moses had not even asked him himself.

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CHAPTER LVIII.

THE HUNT DINNER.



In the Coils.

CARCELY were the congratulations of the company to our hero, on his becoming a member of the renowned Hit-im and Hold-im shire hunt, over, ere a great rush of dinner poured into the room, borne by Peter and the usual miscellaneous attendants at an inn banquet; servants in livery, servants out of livery, servants in a sort of half-livery, servants in place, servants out of place, post-boys converted into footmen,

"boots" put into shoes. Then the carrot and turnip garnished roasts and boils, and stews were crowded down the table, in a profusion that would astonish any one who thinks it impossible to dine under a guinea a head. Rounds, sirloins, saddles, sucking-pigs, poultry, &c. (for they dispensed with the formalities of soup and fish), being duly distributed, Peter announced the fact deferentially to Sir Moses, as he stood monopolising the best place before the fire, whereupon the Baronet, drawing his hands out of his trowsers pockets, let fall his yellow-lined laps, and, clapping his hands, exclaimed, "DINNER,

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GENTLEMEN!" in a stentorian voice, adding, " PRINGLE ! you sit on my right! and CUDDY!" appealing to our friend Flintoff, " will you take the vice-chair ? "

" With all my heart ! " replied Cuddy, whereupon, making an imaginary hunting-horn of his hand, he put it to his mouth, and went blowing and hooping down the room, to entice a certain portion of the guests after him. All parties being at length suited with seats, grace was said, and the assault commenced with the vigorous determination of over-due appetites.

If a hand-in-the-pocket-hunt-dinner possesses few attractions in the way of fare, it is nevertheless free from the restraints and anxieties that pervade private entertainments, where the host cranes at the facetious as he scowls at his butler, or madame mingles her pleasantries with prayers for the safe arrival of the creams, and those extremely capricious sensitive jellies. People eat as if they had come to dine and not to talk, some, on this occasion, eating with their knives, some with their forks, some with both occasionally. And so, what with one aid and another, they made a very great clatter.

The first qualms of hunger being at length appeased, Sir Moses proceeded to select subjects for politeness in the wine-taking way—men whom he could not exactly have at his own house, but who might be prevented from asking for cover-rent, or damages, by a little judicious flattery, or again, men who were only supposed to be lukewarmly disposed towards the great Hit-im and Hold-im shire hunt.

Sir Moses would rather put his hand into a chimney-sweep's pocket than into his own, but so long as anything could be got by the tongue he never begrudged it. So he " sherried " with Mossman and the army of observation generally, also with Pica, who always puffed his hunt, cutting at D'Orsay Davis's efforts on behalf of the Earl, and with Buckwheat (whose son he had recently dom'd à la Rowley Abingdon), and with Corduroys, and Straddler, and Hicks, and Doubledrill—with nearly all the dark coats, in short—Cuddy Flintoff, too, kept the game a-going at his end of the table, as well to promote

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conviviality as to get as much wine as he could ; so altogether there was a pretty brisk consumption, and some of the tight-clad gentlemen began to look rather apoplectic. Cannon-ball-like plum-puddings, hip-bath-like apple-pies, and foaming creams, completed the measure of their uneasiness, and left little room for any cheese. Nature being at length most abundantly satisfied throughout the assembly, grace was again said, and the cloth cleared for action. The regulation port and sherry, with light—very light—Bordeaux, being duly placed upon the table, with piles of biscuits at intervals, down the centre, Sir Moses tapped the well-indentured mahogany with his presidential hammer, and proceeded to prepare the guests for the great toast of the evening, by calling upon them to fill bumpers to the usual loyal and patriotic ones. These being duly disposed of, he at length rose for the all-important let off, amid the nudges and “now then’s” of such of the party as feared a fresh attempt on their pockets—Mossman and Co., in particular, were all eyes, ears, and fears.

“Gentlemen !” cried Sir Moses, rising, and diving his hands into his trowsers pockets—“Gentlemen !” repeated he, with an ominous cough, that sounded very like cash.

“*Hark to Baronet !—hark !*” cheered Cuddy Flintoff from the other end of the room, thus cutting short a discussion about wool, a bargain for beans, and an inquiry for snuff in his own immediate neighbourhood, and causing a tapping of the table further up.

“Gentlemen !” repeated Sir Moses for the third time, amid cries of “hear, hear,” and “order, order”—“I now have the pleasure of introducing to your notice the toast of the evening—a toast endeared by a thousand associations, and rendered classical by the recollection of the great and good men who have given it in times gone by from this very chair—(applause). I need hardly say, gentlemen, that that toast is the renowned Hit-im and Hold-im shire hunt—(renewed applause)—a hunt second to none in the kingdom ; a hunt whose name is famous throughout the land, and whose members are the very flower and *élite* of society—(renewed applause). Never, he was happy

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to say, since it was established, were its prospects so bright and cheering as they were at the present time—(great applause, the announcement being considered indicative of a healthy exchequer)—its country was great, its covers perfect, and thanks to their truly invaluable allies—the farmers—their foxes most abundant—(renewed applause). Of those excellent men it was impossible to speak in terms of too great admiration and respect—(applause)—whether he looked at those he was blessed with upon his own estate—(laughter)—or at the great body generally, he was lost for words to express his opinion of their patriotism, and the obligations he felt under to them. So far from ever hinting at such a thing as damage, he really believed a farmer would be hooted from the market-table who broached such a subject—(applause, with murmurs of dissent)—or who even admitted it was possible that any could be done—(laughter and applause). As for a few cocks and hens, he was sure they felt a pleasure in presenting them to the foxes. At all events, he could safely say he had never paid for any—(renewed laughter). Looking, therefore, at the hunt in all its aspects—its sport past, present, and to come—he felt that he never addressed them under circumstances of greater promise, or with feelings of livelier satisfaction. It only remained for them to keep matters up to the present mark, to insure great and permanent prosperity. He begged, therefore, to propose, with all the honours, Success to the Hit-im and Hold-im shire hunt!"—(drank with three times three and one cheer more). Sir Moses and Cuddy Flintoff mounting their chairs to mark time, Flintoff finishing off with a round of view halloas and other hunting noises.

When the applause and Sir Moses had both subsided, parties who had felt uneasy about their pockets began to breathe more freely, and as the bottles again circulated, Mr. Mossman and others, for whom wine was too cold, slipped out to get their pipes, and something warm in the bar; Mossman calling for whiskey, Buckwheat for brandy, Broadfurrow for gin, and so on. Then, as they sugared and flavoured their tumblers, they chewed the cud of Sir Moses' eloquence, and at length

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commenced discussing it, as each man got seated with his pipe in his mouth and his glass on his knee, in the little glass-fronted bar.

"What a man he is to talk, that Sir Moses," observed Buckwheat, after a long respiration.

"He's a greet ecoonomist of the truth, I reckon," replied Mr. Mossman, withdrawing his pipe from his mouth, "for I've written to him till I'm tired, about last year's damage to Mrs. Anthill's sown grass."

"He's right, though, in saying he never paid for poultry," observed Mr. Broadfurrow, with a humorous shake of his big head, "but, my word, his hook-nosed agent has as many letters as would paper a room;" and so they sipped, and smoked, and talked the Baronet over, each man feeling considerably relieved at there being no fresh attempt on the pocket.

Meanwhile Sir Moses, with the aid of Cuddy Flintoff, trimmed the table, and kept the bottles circulating briskly, presently calling on Mr. Paul Straddler for a song, who gave them the old heroic one, descriptive of a gallant run with the Hit-im and Hold-im shire hounds, in the days of Mr. Customer, at which they all laughed and applauded as heartily as if they had never heard it before. They then drank Mr. Straddler's health, and thanks to him for his excellent song.

As it proceeded, Sir Moses intimated quietly to our friend Billy Pringle that he should propose his health next, which would enable Mr. Pringle to return the compliment by proposing Sir Moses, an announcement that threw our hero into a very considerable state of trepidation, but from which he saw no mode of escape. Sir Moses then having allowed a due time to elapse after the applause that followed the drinking of Mr. Straddler's health, again arose, and tapping the table with his hammer, called upon them to fill bumpers to the health of his young friend on his right (applause). "He could not express the pleasure it afforded him," he said, "to see a nephew of his old friend and brother Baronet, Sir Jonathan Pringle, become a member of their excellent hunt, and he hoped Billy would long live to enjoy the glorious diversion of fox-hunting,"

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which Sir Moses said it was the bounden duty of every true-born Briton to support to the utmost of his ability, for that it was peculiarly the sport of gentlemen, and about the only one that defied the insidious arts of the blackleg, adding that Lord Derby was quite right in saying that racing had got into the hands of parties who kept horses not for sport, but as mere instruments of gambling, and if his (Sir Moses') young friend, Mr. Pringle, would allow him to counsel him, he would say, "Never have anything to do with the turf (applause). Stick to hunting, and if it didn't bring him in money, it would bring him in health, which was better than money," with which declaration Sir Moses most cordially proposed Mr. Pringle's health (drunk with three times three and one cheer more).

Now our friend had never made a speech in his life, but being as we said at the outset blessed with a great determination of words to the mouth, he rose at a hint from Sir Moses, and assured the company how grateful he was for the honour they had done him, as well in electing him a member of their delightful sociable hunt, as in responding to the toast of his health in the flattering manner they had, "and he could assure them that nothing should be wanting on his part to promote the interests of the establishment, and to prove himself worthy of their continued good opinion," at which intimation Sir Moses winked knowingly at Mr. Smoothley, who hemmed a recognition of his meaning.

Meanwhile Mr. Pringle stood twirling his trifling moustache, wishing to sit down, but feeling there was something that ought to keep him up: still he couldn't hit it off. Even a friendly round of applause failed to help him out. At length, Sir Moses fearing he might stop altogether, whispered the words "*My health,*" just under his nose; at which Billy perking up, exclaimed, "Oh, aye, to be sure!" and seizing a decanter under him, he filled himself a bumper of port, calling upon the company to follow his example. This favor being duly accorded, our friend then proceeded, in a very limping, halting sort of way, to eulogise a man with whom he was very little

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acquainted amid the friendly word-supplying cheers and plaudits of the party. At length he stopped again, still feeling that he was not due on his seat, but quite unable to say why he should not resume it. The company thinking he might have something to say to the purpose, how he meant to hunt with them, or something of that sort, again supplied the cheers of encouragement. It was of no use, however, he couldn't hit it off.

* * * * *

"All the honors!" at length whispered Sir Moses as before.

"O, ah, to be sure! *all the honors!*" replied Billy aloud, amidst the mirth of the neighbours. "Gentlemen!" continued he, elevating his voice to its former pitch. "This toast I feel assured—that is to say, I feel quite certain. I mean," stammered he, stamping with his foot, "I, I, I."

"*Aye, noo thou's i' Watlington woods!*" exclaimed the half-drunk Mr. Corduroys, an announcement that drew forth such a roar of laughter as enabled Billy to tack the words "*all the honors!*" to the end, and so with elevated glass to continue the noise with cheers. He then sate down, perfectly satisfied with this his first performance, feeling that he had the germs of oratory within him.

A suitable time having elapsed, Sir Moses rose and returned thanks with great vigour, declaring that beyond all comparison that was the proudest moment of his life, and that he wouldn't exchange the mastership of the Hit-im and Hold-im shire hounds for the highest, the noblest office in the world—Dom'd if he would! with which asseveration he drank all their very good healths, and resumed his seat amidst loud and long continued applause, the timidest then feeling safe against further demands on their purses. Another song quickly followed, and then according to the usual custom of society, that the more you abuse a man in private the more you praise him in public, Sir Moses next proposed the health of that excellent and popular nobleman the Earl of Ladythorne, whose splendid pack showed such unrivalled sport in the adjoining county of

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Featherbedford ; Sir Moses, after a great deal of flattery, concluding by declaring that he would “go to the world’s end to serve Lord Ladythorne—Dom’d if he wouldn’t,” a sort of compliment that the noble earl never reciprocated ; on the contrary, indeed, when he condescended to admit the existence of such a man as Sir Moses, it was generally in that well-known disparaging enquiry, “Who is that Sir Aaron Mainchance ?” or “who is that Sir Somebody Mainchance, who hunts Hit-im and Hold-im shire ?” He never could hit off the Baronet’s Christian or rather Jewish name. Now, however, it was all the noble Earl, “my noble friend and brother master,” the “noble and gallant sportsman,” and so on. Sir Moses thus partly revenging himself on his lordship with the freedom.

When a master of hounds has to borrow a “draw” from an adjoining country, it is generally a pretty significant hint that his own is exhausted, and when the chairman of a hunt dinner begins toasting his natural enemy the adjoining master, it is pretty evident that the interest of the evening is over. So it was on the present occasion. Broad backs kept bending away at intervals, thinking nobody saw them leaving large gaps unclosed up, while the guests that remained merely put a few drops in the bottoms of their glasses or passed the bottles altogether.

Sir Aaron, we beg his pardon—Sir Moses, perceiving this, and knowing the value of a good report, called on those who were left to fill a bumper to the health of their excellent and truly invaluable friend Mr. Pica, contrasting his quiet habits with the swaggering bluster of a certain Brummagem Featherbedfordshire D’Orsay.” (Drank with great applause, D’Orsay Davis having more than once sneered at the equestrian prowess of the Hit-im and Hold-im shire-ites.)

Mr. Pica, who was a fisherman, and a very bad one to boot, then arose and began dribbling out the old stereotyped formula about air we breathe, have it not we die, &c., which was a signal for a general rise ; not all Sir Moses and Cuddy Flintoff’s united efforts being able to restrain the balance of guests from breaking away, and a squabble occurring behind the screen

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about a hat, the chance was soon irrevocably gone. Mr. Pica was, therefore, left alone in his glory. If any one, however, can afford to be indifferent about being heard, it is surely an editor who can report himself in his paper, and poor Pica did himself ample justice in the "Hit-im and Hold-im shire Herald" on the Saturday following.

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CHAPTER LIX.

THE HUNT TEA.



Tea versus Brandy.

HE 15th rule of the Hit-im and Hold-imshire hunt, provides that all members who dine at the club, may have tea and muf-fins ad libitum for 6d. a head afterwards, and certainly nothing can be more refreshing after a brawling riotous dinner than a little quiet, comfortable Bohea. Sir Moses always had

his six-penn'orth, as had a good many of his friends and followers.

Indeed the rule was a proposition of the Baronet's, such a thing as tea being unheard of in the reign of Mr. Customer, or any of Sir Moses' great predecessors. Those were the days of "lift him up and carry him to bed." Thank goodness they are gone! Men can hunt without thinking it necessary to go out with a headache. Beating a jug in point of capacity is no longer considered the accomplishment of a gentleman.

Mr. Pica's eloquence having rather prematurely dissolved the meeting, Sir Moses and his friends now congregated

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round the fire, all very cheery and well pleased with themselves—each flattering the other in hopes of getting a compliment in return. “Gone off amazingly well!” exclaimed one, rubbing his hands in delight at its being over. “Capital party,” observed another. “Excellent speech yours, Sir Moses,” interposed a third. “Never heard a better,” asserted a fourth. “Ought to ask to have it printed,” observed a fifth. “O, never fear! Pica’ll do that,” rejoined a sixth, and so they went on warding off the awkward thought, so apt to arise, of “what a bore these sort of parties are. Wonder if they do any good?”

The good they do was presently shown on this occasion by Mr. Smoothley, the Jackall of the hunt, whose pecuniary obligations to Sir Moses we have already hinted at, coming bowing and fawning obsequiously up to our Billy, revolving his hands as though he were washing them, and congratulating him upon becoming one of them. Mr. Smoothley was what might be called the head pacificator of the hunt, the gentleman who coaxed subscriptions, deprecated damage, and tried to make young gentlemen believe they had had very good runs, when in fact they had only had very middling ones.

The significant interchange of glances between Sir Moses and him during Billy’s speech related to a certain cover called Waverley gorse, which the young Woolpack, Mr. Treadcroft, who had ascertained his inability to ride, had announced his intention of resigning. The custom of the hunt was, first to get as many covers as they could for nothing; secondly, to quarter as few on the club funds as possible; and thirdly, to get young gentlemen to stand godfathers to covers, in other words to get them to pay the rent in return for the compliment of the cover passing by their names, as Heslop’s spinny, Linch’s gorse, Benson’s banks, and so on.

This was generally an after-dinner performance, and required a skilful practitioner to accomplish, more particularly as the trick was rather notorious. Mr. Smoothley was now about to try his hand on Mr. Pringle. The bowing and congratulations

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over, and the flexible back straightened, he commenced by observing that he supposed a copy of the rules of the hunt addressed to Pangburn Park, would find our friend.

"Yarse," drawled Billy, wondering if there would be anything to pay. "Dash it, he wished there mightn't? Shouldn't be surprised if there was?"

Mr. Smoothley, however, gave him little time for reflection, for taking hold of one of his own red-coat buttons, he observed, "that as he supposed Mr. Pringle would be sporting the hunt uniform, he might take the liberty of mentioning that Garnett the silversmith in the market-place had by far the neatest and best pattern'd buttons."

"Oh, Garnett, oh, yarse," replied Billy, thinking he would get a set for his pink, instead of the plain ones he was wearing.

"His shop is next the Lion and the Lamb public house," continued Mr. Smoothley, "between it and Mrs. Russelton the milliner's, and by the way, that reminds me," continued he, though we don't exactly see how it could, "and by the way that reminds me that there is an excellent opportunity for distinguishing yourself by adopting the cover young Mr. Treadcroft has just abandoned."

"The w-h-a-at?" drawled Billy, dreading a "do;" his mother having cautioned him always to be mindful after dinner.

"O, merely the gorse," continued Mr. Smoothley, in the most affable matter-of-course way imaginable, "merely the gorse—if you'll step this way, I'll show you," continued he, leading the way to where a large dirty board was suspended against the wall below the portrait of Lord Martingal on his horse.

"*Now he's running into him!*" muttered Sir Moses to himself, his keen eye supplying the words to the action.

"This, you see," explained Mr. Smoothley, hitching the board off its brass-headed nail, and holding it to the light—"this, you see, is a list of all the covers in the country—Screechley, Summerfield, Reddingfield, Bewley, Lanton Hill,

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Baxterley, and so forth. Then you see here," continued he, pointing to a ruled column opposite, "are the names of the owners or patrons—yes" (reading), "owners or patrons—Lord Oilcake, Lord Polkaton, Sir Harry Fuzball, Mr. Heslop, Lord Harpsichord, Mr. Drew, Mr. Smith. Now young Mr. Treadcroft, who has had as many falls as he likes, and perhaps more, has just announced his intention of retiring and giving up this cover," pointing to Waverley, with Mr. Treadcroft, Jun.'s name opposite to it, "and it struck me that it would be a capital opportunity for you who have just joined us to take it before anybody knows, and then it will go by the name of Pringle's gorse, and you'll get the credit of all the fine runs that take place from it."

"Y-a-r-s-e," drawled Billy, thinking that that would be a sharp thing to do, and that it would be fine to rank with the lords.

"Then," continued Mr. Smoothley, taking the answer for an assent, "I'll just strike Tready's name out and put yours in;" so saying, he darted at the sideboard, and seizing an old ink-clotted stump of a pen, with just enough go in it to make the required alteration, and substituted Mr. Pringle's name for that of Mr. Treadcroft. And so, what with his cover, his dinner, and his button, poor Billy was eased of above twenty pounds.

Just as Sir Moses was blowing his beak, stirring the fire, and chuckling at the success of the venture, a jingling of cups and tinkling of spoons was heard in the distance, and presently a great flight of tea-trays emerged from either side of the screen, conspicuous among the bearers of which were the tall ticket-of-leave butler and the hirsute Monsieur Jean Rougier. These worthies, with a few other "gentlemen's gentlemen," had been regaled to a supper in the "Blenheim," to which Peter had contributed a liberal allowance of hunt wine, the consumption of which was checked by the corks, one set, it was said, serving Peter the season. That that which is everybody's business is nobody's, is well exemplified in these sort of transactions, for though a member of the hunt



MR. SMOOTHLEY BEGUILING BILLY PRINGLE.

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went through the form of counting the cork-tops every evening, and seeing that they corresponded with the number set down in Peter's book, nobody ever compared the book with the cellar, so that in fact Peter was both check-keeper and auditor. Public bodies, however, are all considered fair game, and the Hit-im and Hold-im shire hunt was no exception to the rule. In addition to the wine, there had been a sufficient allowance of spirits in the "Blenheim" to set the drunkards to work on their own account, and Jack Rogers, who was quite the life of the party, was very forward in condition when the tea-summons was heard.

"Hush!" cried Peter, holding up his hand, and listening to an ominous bell-peal, "I do believe that's for tea! So it is," sighed he, as a second summons broke upon the ear. "Tea at this hour!" ejaculated he, "who'd ha' thought it twenty years ago! Why, this is just the time they'd ha' been calling for Magnums, and beginnin' the evening—*Tea!* They'd as soon ha' thought of callin' for vinegar!" added he, with a bitter sneer. So saying, Peter dashed a tear from his aged eye, and rising from his chair, craved the assistance of his guests to carry the degrading beverage up-stairs to our degenerate party. "A set of wetherwomen!" muttered he, as the great slop-bason-like-cups stood ranged on trays along the kitchen-table ready for conveyance. "Serves us right for allowing such a chap to take our country," added he, adopting his load, and leading the tea-van.

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CHAPTER LX.

BUSHEY HEATH AND BARE ACRES.



HEN the soothing, smoking beverage entered, our friend, Cuddy Flintoff, was “yoicking” himself about the club-room, stopping now at this picture, now that, holloaing at one, view holloaing at another, thus airing his hunting noises generally, as each successive subject recalled some lively association in his too sensitive hunting imagination. Passing from the contemplation of that great work of art, Mr. Customer getting drunk, he suddenly confronted the tea-brigade entering, led by Peter, Monsieur, and the ticket-of-leave butler.

“HOLLOA! OLD BUSHEY HEATH!” exclaimed Cuddy, clapping his hands, as Monsieur’s frizzed face loomed conspicuously behind a muffin-towering-tea-tray. “HOLLOA! OLD BUSHEY HEATH!” repeated he, louder than before, “*What cheer there?*”

“VOT CHEER THERE, BROTHER BAREACRES?” replied Jack in the same familiar tone, to the great consternation of Cuddy, and the amusement of the party.

“Dash the fellow! but he’s getting bumptious,” muttered Cuddy, who had no notion of being taken up that way by a servant. “Dash the fellow! but he’s getting bumptious,” repeated he, adding aloud to Jack, “That’s not the way you talked when you tumbled off your horse the other day ”

“Tumbled off my ‘oss, sare!” replied Jack, indignantly—“tumbled off my ‘oss, sare—nevare, sare!—nevare!”

“What!” retorted Cuddy, “do you mean to say you didn’t

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tumble off your horse on the Crooked Billet day?" for Cuddy had heard of that exploit, but not of Jack's subsequent performance.

"No, sare, I jomp off," replied Jack, thinking Cuddy alluded to his change of horses with the Woolpack.

"*Jo-o-mp* off! *j-o-omp* off!" reiterated Cuddy, "we all jump off when we can't keep on. Why didn't old Imperial John take you into the Crooked Billet, and scrape you, and cherish you, and comfort you, and treat you as he would his own son?" demanded Cuddy.

"Imperial John, sare, nevare did nothin' of the sort," replied Jack, confidently. "Imperial John and I retired to 'ave leetle drop drink together to our better 'quaintance. I met John there, *n'est-ce pas?* Monsieur Sare Moses, Baronet! Vasn't it as I say?" asked Jack, jingling his tea-tray before the Baronet.

"O yes," replied Sir Moses,—"O yes, undoubtedly; I introduced you there; but here! let me have some tea," continued he, taking a cup, wishing to stop the conversation, lest Lord Ladythorne might hear he had introduced his right-hand man, Imperial John, to a servant.

Cuddy, however, wasn't to be stopped. He was sure Jack had tumbled off, and was bent upon working him in return for his Bareacres compliment.

"Well, but tell us," said he, addressing Jack again, "did you come over his head or his tail, when you jomp off?"

"Don't, Cuddy! don't!" now muttered Sir Moses, taking the entire top tier off a pile of muffins, and filling his mouth as full as it would hold; "don't," repeated he, adding, "it's no use (munch) bullying a poor (crunch) beggar because he's a (munch) Frenchman" (crunch). Sir Moses then took a great draught of tea.

Monsieur's monkey, however, was now up, and he felt inclined to tackle with Flintoff. "I tell you vot, sare Cuddy," said he, looking him full in the face, "you think yourself vare great man, vare great ossman, vare great foxer, and so on, bot I vill ride you a match for vot monies you please."

"Hoo-ray! well done you! go it, Monsieur! Who'd ha'

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thought it! Now for some fun!" resounded through the room, bringing all parties in closer proximity.

Flintoff was rather taken aback. He didn't expect anything of that sort, and though he fully believed Jack to be a tailor, he didn't want to test the fact himself; indeed he felt safer on foot than on horseback, being fonder of the theory than of the reality of hunting.

"Hut you and your matches," sneered he, thrusting his hands deep in his trowsers pockets, inclining to sheer off, adding, "go and get his Imperial Highness to ride you one."

"His Imperial Highness, sare, don't deal in oss matches. He is not a jockey, he is a gentlemans—great friend of de great lords vot rules de oder noisy dogs," replied Jack.

"*Humph,*" grunted Sir Moses, not liking the language.

"*In-deed!*" exclaimed Cuddy, with a frown. "*In-deed!* Hark to Monsieur! Hark!"

"Oh, make him a match, Cuddy! make him a match!" now interposed Paul Straddler, closing up to prevent Cuddy's retreat. Paul, as we said before, was a disengaged gentleman who kept a house of call for Bores at Hinton,—a man who was always ready to deal, or do anything, or go anywhere at any body else's expense. A great judge of a horse, a great judge of a groom, a great judge of a gig, a gentleman a good deal in Cuddy Flintoff's own line in short, and of course not a great admirer of his. He now thought he saw his way to a catch, for the Woolpack had told him how shamefully Jack had bucketed his horse, and altogether he thought Monsieur might be as good a man across country as Mr. Flintoff. At all events he would like to see.

"Oh, make him a match, Cuddy! make him a match!" now exclaimed he, adding in Flintoff's ear, "never let it be said you were afraid of a Frenchman."

"Afraid!" sneered Cuddy, "nobody who knows me will think that, I guess."

"Well then, *make* him a match!" urged Tommy Heslop, who was no great admirer of Cuddy's either; "*make* him a match, and I'll go your halves."

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"And I'll go Monsieur's," said Mr. Straddler, still backing the thing up. Thus appealed to, poor Cuddy was obliged to submit, and before he knew where he was, the dread pen, ink and paper were produced, and things began to assume a tangible form. Mr. Paul Straddler, having seated himself on a chair at the opportune card table, began sucking his pen and smoothing out his paper, trying to coax his ideas into order.

"Now, let us see," said he, "now let us see. Monsieur, what's his name—old Bushey-heath as you call him, agrees to ride Mr. Flintoff a match across country—now for distance, time, and stake! now for distance, time, and stake!" added he, hitting off the scent.

"Well, but how can you make a match without any horses? how can you make a match without any horses?" asked Sir Moses, interposing his beak, adding, "I'll not lend any—dom'd if I will." That being the first time Sir Moses was ever known not to volunteer one.

"O, we'll find horses," replied Tommy Heslop, "we'll find horses!" thinking Sir Moses' refusal was all in favor of the match. "Catch weights, catch horses, catch every thing."

"Now for distance, time, and stake," reiterated Mr. Straddler. "Now for distance, time, and stake, Monsieur!" continued he, appealing to Jack. "What distance would you like to have it?"

"Vot you please, sare," replied Monsieur, now depositing his tray on the sideboard; "vot you please, sare, much or little; ten miles, twenty miles, any miles he likes."

"O, the fellow's mad," muttered Cuddy, with a jerk of his head, making a last effort to be off.

"Don't be in a hurry, Cuddy, don't be in a hurry," interposed Heslop, adding, "he doesn't understand it—he doesn't understand it."

"O, I understands it, nicely, vell enough," replied Jack, with a shrug of his shoulders; "put us on to two 'orses, and see vich gets first to de money post."

"Aye, yes, exactly, to be sure, that's all right," asserted

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Paul Straddler, looking up approvingly at Jack, "and you say you'll beat Mr. Flintoff?"

"I say I beat Mr. Flintoff," rejoined Jack—"beat 'im dem vell too—beat his 'ead off—beat him *stupendous!*!" added he.

"O, dash it all we can't stand that, Cuddy!" exclaimed Mr. Heslop, nudging Mr. Flintoff; "honor of the country, honor of the hunt, honor of England, honor of every thing's involved."

Cuddy's bristles were now up too, and shaking his head and thrusting his hands deep into his trowsers pockets, "he declared he couldn't stand that sort of language—shot if he could."

"No; nor nobody else," continued Mr. Heslop, keeping him up to the indignity mark; "must be taught better manners," added he with a pout of the lip, as though fully espousing Cuddy's cause.

"Come along, then! come along!" cried Paul Straddler, flourishing his dirty pen; "let's set up a school for grown sportsmen. Now for the good boys. Master Bushey-heath says he'll ride Master Bareacres a match across country—two miles say—for, for, how much?" asked he, looking up.

This caused a pause, as it often does, even after dinner, and not the less so in the present instance, inasmuch as the promoters of the match had each a share in the risk. What would be hundreds in other people's cases becomes pounds in our own.

Flintoff and Straddler looked pacifically at each other, as much as to say, "There's no use in cutting each other's throats, you know."

"Suppose we say" (exhibiting four fingers and a thumb, slyly to indicate a five-pound note), said Heslop, demurely, after a conference with Cuddy.

"With all my heart," asserted Straddler, "glad it was no more."

"And call it fifty," whispered Heslop.

"Certainly!" assented Straddler, "very proper arrangement."

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"Two miles for fifty pounds," announced Straddler, writing it down.

"P. P. I s'pose?" observed he, looking up.

"P. P." assented Heslop.

"Now, what next?" asked Paul, feeling that there was something more wanted.

"An umpire," suggested Mr. Smoothley.

"Ah, to be sure, an umpire," replied Mr. Straddler; "who shall it be?"

"Sir Moses!" suggested several voices.

"Sir Moses, by all means," replied Straddler.

"Content," nodded Mr. Heslop.

"It must be on a non-hunting day, then," observed the Baronet, speaking from the bottom of his tea-cup.

"Non-hunting day!" repeated Cuddy; "non-hunting day; fear that 'ill not do—want to be off to town on Friday to see Tommy White's horses sold. Have been above a week at the Park, as it is."

"You've been a fortnight to-morrow, sir," observed the ticket-of-leave butler (who had just come to announce the carriage) in a very different tone to his usual urbane whisper.

"Fortnight to-morrow, have I?" rejoined Cuddy sheepishly, "greater reason why I should be off."

"O, never think about that! O, never think about that! Heartily welcome, heartily welcome," rejoined Sir Moses, stuffing his mouth full of muffin, adding, "Mr. Pringle will keep you company; Mr. Pringle will keep you company." (Hunch, munch, crunch.)

"Mr. Pringle must stop," observed Mr. Straddler, "unless he goes without his man."

"To be sure he must," assented Sir Moses, "to be sure he must," adding, "stop as long as ever you like. I've no engagement till Saturday—no engagement till Saturday."

Now putting off our friend's departure till Saturday just gave a clear day for the steeple-chase, the next one, Thursday, being Woolerton by Heckfield, Saturday the usual make-believe day at the kennels; so of course Friday was fixed

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upon, and Sir Moses having named "noon" as the hour, and Timberlake toll-bar as the rendezvous, commenced a series of adieus as he beat a retreat to the screen, where having resumed his wraps, and gathered his tail, he shot downstairs, and was presently re-ensconced in his carriage.

The remanets then of course proceeded to talk him and his friends over, some wishing the Baronet mightn't be too many for Billy, others again thinking Cuddy wasn't altogether the most desirable acquaintance a young man could have, though there wasn't one that didn't think that he himself was.

That topic being at length exhausted, they then discussed the projected steeple-chase, some thinking that Cuddy was a muff, others that Jack was, some again thinking they both were. And as successive relays of hot brandy and water enabled them to see matters more clearly, the Englishman's argument of betting was introduced, and closed towards morning at "evens," either jockey for choice.

Let us now take a look at the homeward bound party.

It was lucky for Billy that the night was dark and the road rough with newly-laid whinstones, for both Sir Moses and Cuddy opened upon him most volubly and vehemently as soon as ever they got off the uneven pavement, with no end of inquiries about Jack and his antecedents. If he could ride? If he had ever seen him ride? If he had ever ridden a steeple-chase? Where he got him? How long he had had him?

To most of which questions, Billy replied with his usual monosyllabic drawling, "yarses," amid jolts, and grinds, and gratings, and doms from Sir Moses, and cusses from Cuddy, easing his conscience with regard to Jack's service, by saying that he had had him "some time." Some time! What a fine elastic period that is. We'd back a lawyer to make it cover a century or a season. Very little definite information, however, did they extract from Billy with regard to Jack, for the best of all reasons, that Billy didn't know anything. Both Cuddy and Sir Moses interpreted his ignorance differently, and wished he mightn't know more than was good for them. And so in the midst of roughs and smooths, and jolts and jumps, and

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examinings, and cross-examinings, and re-examinings, they at length reached Pangburn Park Lodges, and were presently at home.

"Breakfast at eight!" said Sir Moses to Bankhead, as he alighted from the carriage.

"Breakfast at eight, Pringle!" repeated he, and seizing a flat candlestick from the half-drunken footman in the passage, he hurried up-stairs, blowing his beak with great vigour to drown any appeal to him about a horse.

He little knew how unlikely our young friend was to trouble him in that way.

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CHAPTER LXI.

MR. GEORDEY GALLON.



UDDY FLINTOFF did not awake at all comfortable the next morning, and he distinctly traced the old copyhead of "Familiarity breeds contempt," in the hieroglyphical pattern of his old chintz bed-hangings. He couldn't think how he could ever be so foolish as to lay himself open to such a catastrophe; it was just the wine being in and the wit being out, coupled with the fact of the man being a Frenchman, that led him away—and he most devoutly wished he was well out of the scrape. Suppose Monsieur was a top sawyer! Suppose he was a regular steeple-chaser! Suppose he was a second Beecher in disguise! It didn't follow, because he was a Frenchman that he couldn't ride. Altogether Mr. Flintoff repented. It wasn't nice amusement steeple-chasing he thought, and the quicksilver of youth had departed from him; getting called Bare-acres, too, was derogatory, and what no English servant would have done, if even he had called him Bushey Heath.

Billy Pringle, on the other hand, was very comfortable, and slept soundly, regardless of clubs, cover rents, over-night consequences, altogether. Each having desired to be called when the other got up, they stood a chance of lying in bed all day, had not Mrs. Margerum, fearing they would run their breakfast and the servants'-hall dinner together, despatched Monsieur and the footman with their respective hot-water cans, to say the other had risen. It was eleven o'clock ere they got dawdled down-stairs, and Cuddy again began demanding this and that

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delicacy in the name of Mr. Pringle: Mr. Pringle wanted Yorkshire pie; Mr. Pringle wanted potted prawns; Mr. Pringle wanted bantams' eggs; Mr. Pringle wanted honey. Why the deuce didn't they attend to Mr. Pringle?

The breakfast was presently interrupted by the sound of wheels, and almost ere they had ceased to revolve, a brisk pull at the door-bell aroused the inmates of both the front and back regions, and brought the hurrying footman, settling himself into his yellow-edged blue-livery coat as he came.

It was Mr. Heslop. Heslop in a muffin cap, and so disguised in heather-coloured tweed, that Mr. Pringle failed to recognise him as he entered. Cuddy did, though; and greeting him with one of his best view holloas, he invited him to sit down and partake.

Heslop was an early bird, and had broke his fast hours before; but a little more breakfast being neither here nor there, he did as he was requested, though he would much rather have found Cuddy alone. He wanted to talk to him about the match, to hear if Sir Moses had said anything about the line of country, what sort of a horse he would like to ride, and so on.

Billy went munch, munch, munching on, in the tiresome, pertinacious sort of way people do when others are anxiously wishing them done—now taking a sip of tea, now a bit of toast, now another egg, now looking as if he didn't know what he would take. Heslop inwardly wished him at Jericho. At length another sound of wheels was heard, followed by another peal of the bell; and our hero presently had a visitor, too, in the person of Mr. Paul Straddler. Paul had come on the same sort of errand as Heslop, namely, to arrange matters about Monsieur; and Heslop and he, seeing how the land lay, Heslop asked Cuddy if there was any one in Sir Moses' study; whereupon Cuddy arose and led the way to the sunless little sanctum, where Sir Moses kept his other hat, his other boots, his rows of shoes, his beloved but rather empty cash-box, and the plans and papers of the Pangburn Park estate.

Two anxious deliberations then ensued in the study and



"POACHER, PUGILIST, AND PUBLICAN."

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breakfast-room, in the course of which Monsieur was summoned into the presence of either party, and retired, leaving them about as wise as he found them. He declared he could ride, ride "dem vell too," and told Paul he could "beat Cuddy's head off;" but he accompanied the assertions with such wild, incoherent arguments, and talked just as he did to Imperial John before the Crooked Billet, that they thought it was all gasconade. If it hadn't been P. P., Paul would have been off. Cuddy, on the other hand, gained courage; and as Heslop proposed putting him on his famous horse General Havelock, the reported best fencer in the country, Cuddy, who wasn't afraid of pace, hoped to be able to give a good account of himself. Indeed, he so far recovered his confidence, as to indulge in a few hunting noises—"For-rard on! For-rard on!" cheered he, as if he was leading the way with the race well in hand.

Meanwhile Monsieur, who could keep his own counsel, communicated by a certain mysterious agency that prevails in most countries, and seems to rival the electric telegraph in point of speed, to enlist a confederate in his service. This was Mr. Geordey Gallon, a genius carrying on the trades of poacher, pugilist, and publican, under favour of that mistaken piece of legislation the Beer Act. Geordey, like Jack, had begun life as a post-boy, and like him had undergone various vicissitudes ere he finally settled down to the respectable calling we have named. He now occupied the Rose and Crown beer shop at the Four Lane-ends, on the Heatherbell Road, some fifteen miles from Pangburn Park, where, in addition to his regular or irregular calling, he generally kept a racing-like runaway, that whisked a light spring-cart through the country by night, freighted with pigeons, poultry, game, dripping—which latter item our readers doubtless know includes every article of culinary or domestic use. He was also a purveyor of lead, lead stealing being now one of the liberal professions.

Geordey had had a fine time of it, for the Hit-im and Hold-im shire constables were stupid and lazy, and when the short-lived Superintendent ones were appointed, it was only a

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trifle in his way to suborn them. So he made hay while the sun shone, and presently set up a basket-buttoned green cutaway for Sundays, in lieu of the baggy pocketed velveteen shooting-jacket of week days, and replaced the fox-skin cap with a bare shallow drab, with a broad brim, and a black band, encasing his substantial legs in cords and mahogany tops, instead of the navvie boots that laced his great bulging calves into globes. He then called himself a sporting man.

Not a fair, not a fight, not a fray of any sort, but Geordey's great square bull-headed carcase was there, and he was always ready to run his nag, or trot his nag, or match his nag in any shape or way—Mr. George Gallon's Blue Ruin, Mr. George Gallon's Flower of the West, Mr. George Gallon's Honor Bright, will be names familiar to most lovers of leather plateing.* Besides this, he did business in a smaller way. Being a pure patriot, he was a great promoter of the sports and pastimes of the people, and always travelled with a prospectus in his pocket of some raffle for a watch, some shooting-match for a fat hog, some dog or some horse to be disposed of in a surreptitious way, one of the conditions always being, that a certain sum was to be spent by the winner at Mr. Gallon's, of the Rose and Crown, at the Four Lane-ends on the Heatherbell Road.

Such was the worthy selected by Monsieur Rougier to guard his interests in the matter. But how the communication was made, or what were the instructions given, those who are acquainted with the wheels within wheels, and the glorious mystification that prevails in all matters relating to racing or robbing will know the impossibility of narrating. Even Sir

* We append one of Mr. Gallon's advertisements for a horse, which is very characteristic of the man:—

“**A** FLASH HIGH-STEPPING SCREW
WANTED. Must be very fast, steady in
single harness, and the price moderate. Blemishes no
object. Apply, by letter, real name and address, with
full description, to MR. GEORGE GALLON, Rose
and Crown, Four-Lane-ends, Hit-im and Hold-im
shire.”

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Moses was infected with the prevailing epidemic, and returned from hunting greatly subdued in loquacity. He wanted to be on for a £5 or two, but couldn't for the life of him make out which was to be the right side. So he was very chary of his wine after dinner, and wouldn't let Cuddy have any brandy at bed-time—"Dom'd if he would."

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CHAPTER LXII.

SIR MOSES PERPLEXED.



HE great event was ushered in by one of those fine bright autumnal days that shame many summer ones, and seem inclined to carry the winter months fairly over into the coming year. The sun rose with effulgent radiance, gilding the lingering brown and yellow tints, and lighting up the landscape with searching, inquisitorial scrutiny. Not a nook, not a dell, not a cot, not a curl of smoke but was visible, and the whole scene shone with the vigour of a newly burnished newly varnished picture. The cattle stood in bold relief against the perennially green fields, and the newly dipped lambs dotted the hill-sides like white marbles. A clear bright light gleamed through the stems of the Scotch fir belt, encircling the brow of High Rays Hill, giving goodly promise of continued fineness.

Sir Moses, seeing this harbinger of fair from his window as he dressed, arrayed himself in his best attire, securing his new blue and white satin cravat with a couple of massive blood-stone pins, and lacing his broad-striped vest with a multiplicity of chains and appendant gew-gaws. He further dared the elements with an extensive turning up of velvet. Altogether he was a great swell, and extremely well pleased with his appearance.

The inmates of the Park were all at sixes and sevens that morning, Monsieur having left Billy to be valeted by the footman, whose services were entirely monopolised by Cuddy Flintoff and Sir Moses. When he did at length come, he

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replied to Billy's inquiry "how his horse was," that he was "quite well," which was satisfactory to our friend, and confirmed him in his opinion of the superiority of his judgment over that of Wetun and the rest. Sir Moses, however, who had made the tour of the stables, thought otherwise, and telling the Tiger to put the footboard to the back of the dog-cart, reserved the other place in front for his guest. A tremendous hurry Sir Moses was in to be off, rushing in every two or three minutes to see if Billy wasn't done his breakfast, and at last ordering round the vehicle to expedite his movements. Then he went to the door and gave the bell such a furious ring as sounded through the house and seemed well calculated to last for ever.

Billy then came, hustled along by the ticket-of-leave butler and the excitable footman, who kept dressing him as he went; and, putting his mits, his gloves, his shawl, cravat, and his taper umbrella into his hands, they helped him up to the seat by Sir Moses, who forthwith soused him down, by touching the mare with the whip, and starting off at a pace that looked like trying to catch an express train. Round flew the wheels, up shot the yellow mud, open went the lodge gates, bark went the curs, and they were presently among the darker mud of the Marshfield and Greyridge Hill Road.

On, on, Sir Moses pushed, as if in extremis.

"Well now, how is it to be?" at length asked he, getting his mare more by the head, after grinding through a long strip of newly-laid whinstone: "How is it to be? Can this beggar of yours ride, or can he not?" Sir Moses looking with a scrutinising eye at Billy as he spoke.

"Yarse, he can ride," replied Billy, feeling his collar; "rode the other day, you know."

Sir Moses. "Ah, but that's not the sort of riding I mean. Can he ride across country? Can he ride a steeple-chase, in fact?"

Mr. Pringle. "Yarse, I should say he could," hesitated our friend.

Sir Moses. "Well, but it won't do to back a man to do a

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thing one isn't certain he can do, you know. Now, between ourselves," continued he, lowering his voice so as not to let the Tiger hear—"Cuddy Flintoff is no great performer—more of a mahogany sportsman than anything else, and it wouldn't take any great hand to beat him."

Billy couldn't say whether Monsieur was equal to the undertaking or not, and therefore made no reply. This perplexed Sir Moses, who wished that Billy's downy face mightn't contain more mischief than it ought. It would be a devil of a bore, he thought, to be done by such a boy. So he again took the mare short by the head, and gave expression to his thoughts by the whip along her sides. Thus he shot down Walkup Hill at a pace that carried him half way up the opposing one. Still he couldn't see his way—dom'd if he could—and he felt half inclined not to risk his "fi-pun" note.

In this hesitating mood he came within sight of the now crowd-studded rendezvous.

ASK MAMMA.

CHAPTER LXIII.

THE RENDEZVOUS FOR THE RACE.



IMBERLAKE toll bar, the rendezvous for the race, stands on the summit of the hog-backed Wooley Hill, famous for its frequent sheep-fairs, and commands a fine view over the cream of the west side of Featherbedfordshire, and by no means the worst part of the land of Jewdea, as the wags of the former country call Hit-im and Hold-im shire.

Sir Moses had wisely chosen this rendezvous, in order that he might give Lord Ladythorne the benefit of the unwelcome intrusion without exciting the suspicion of the farmers, who would naturally suppose that the match would take place over some part of Sir Moses' own country. In that, however, they had reckoned without their host. Sir Moses wasn't the man to throw a chance away—dom'd if he was.

The road, after crossing the bridge over Bendibus Burn, being all against collar, Sir Moses dropped his reins, and sitting back in his seat, proceeded to contemplate the crowd. A great gathering there was, horsemen, footmen, gigmen, assmen, with here and there a tinkling-belled liquor-vending female, a tossing pie-man, or a nut-merchant. As yet the spirit of speculation was not aroused, and the people gathered in groups, looking as moody as men generally do who want to get the better of each other. The only cheerful faces on the scene were those of Toney Loftus, the pike-man, and his wife, whose neat white-washed, stone-roofed cottage was not much accustomed to company, save on the occasion of the fairs. They were now

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gathering their pence and having a let-off for their long pent-up gossip.

Sir Moses' approach put a little liveliness into the scene, and satisfied the grumbling or sceptical ones that they had not come to the wrong place. There was then a general move towards the great white gate, and as he paid his fourpence the nods of recognition and How are ye's? commenced amid a vigorous salute of the muffin bells. *Tinkle tinkle tinkle, buy buy buy*, toss and try! toss and try! *tinkle tinkle tinkle*. Barcelona nuts, crack 'em and try 'em, crack 'em and try 'em; the invitation being accompanied with the rattle of a few in the little tin can.

"Now, where are the jockeys?" asked Sir Moses, straining his eyeballs over the open downs.

"They're coomin, Sir Moses, they're coomin," replied several voices; and as they spoke, a gaily-dressed man, on a milk-white horse, emerged from the little fold-yard of Butterby farm, about half a mile to the west, followed by two distinct groups of mounted and dismounted companions, who clustered round either champion like electors round a candidate going to the hustings.

"There's Geordey Gallon!" was now the cry, as the hero of the white horse shot away from the foremost group, and came best pace across the rush-grown sward of the sheep-walk towards the toll-bar. "There's Geordey Gallon! and now we shall hear summut about it;" whereupon the scattered groups began to mingle and turn in the direction of the coming man.

It was Mr. Gallon—Mr. Gallon on his famous trotting hack Tippy Tom, a vicious runaway brute, that required constant work to keep it under, a want that Mr. Gallon liberally supplied it with. It now came yawning and boring on the bit, one ear lying one way, the other another, shaking its head like a terrier with a rat in its mouth, with a sort of air that as good as said, "Let me go, or I'll either knock your teeth down your throat with my head, or come back over upon you." So Mr. Gallon let him go, and came careering along at a leg-stuck-out sort of butcher's shuffle, one hand grasping the weather-bleached reins,

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the other a cutting-whip, his green coat-laps and red kerchief ends flying out his baggy white cords and purple plush waist-coat strings all in a flutter, looking as if he was going to bear away the gate and house, Toney Loftus and wife, all before him. Fortunately for the bystanders there was plenty of space, which, coupled with the deep holding ground and Mr. Gallon's ample weight—good sixteen stone—enabled him to bring the white nag to its bearings ; and after charging a flock of geese, and nearly knocking down a Barcelona-nut merchant, he got him manœuvred in a semicircular sort of way up to the gate, just as if it was all right and plain sailing. He then steadied him with a severe double-handed jerk of the bit, coupled with one of those deep ominous *w-h-o o ah's* that always preceded a hiding. Tippy Tom dropped his head as if he understood him.

All eyes were now anxiously scrutinising Gallon's great rubicund double-chinned visage, for, in addition to his general sporting knowledge and acquirements, he was just fresh from the scene of action where he had doubtless been able to form an opinion. Even Sir Moses, who hated the sight of him, and always declared he "ought to be hung," vouchsafed him a "Good morning, Gallon," which the latter returned with a familiar nod.

He then composed himself in his capacious old saddle, and taking off his white shallow began mopping his great bald head, hoping that some one would sound the key note of speculation ere the advancing parties arrived at the gate. They all, however, seemed to wish to defer to Mr. Gallon—Gallon was the man for their money, Gallon knew a thing or two, Gallon was up to snuff—go it, Gallon !

* * * * *

"What does onybody say 'boot it Frenchman ?'" at length asked he in his elliptical Yorkshire dialect, looking round on the company.

"What do *you* say 'boot it Frenchman, Sir Moses ?'" asked he, not getting an answer from any one.

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" Faith, I know nothing," replied the Baronet, with a slight curl of the lip.

" Nay, yeer tied to know summut, hooever," replied Gallon, rubbing his nose across the back of his hand; " yeer tied to know summut, hooever. Why, he's a stoppin' at yeer house, isn't he ? "

" That may all be," rejoined Sir Moses, " without my knowing anything of his riding. What do you say yourself? you've seen him."

" Seen him!" retorted Gallon, " why he's a queer lookin' chap, ony hoo—that's all ar can say; haw, haw, haw."

" You won't back him, then?" said Sir Moses, inquiringly.

" Hardly that," replied Gallon, shaking his head and laughing heartily, " hardly that, Sir Moses. Ar'll tell you what ar'll do, though," said he, " just to mak sport loike, ar'll tak yeer two to one — two croons to one," producing a greasy-looking metallic-pencilled betting-book as he spoke.

Just then a move outside the ring announced an arrival, and presently Mr. Heslop came steering Cuddy Flintoff along in his wife's Croydon basket-carriage, Cuddy's head decked in an orange-coloured silk cap, and his whole person enveloped in a blue pilot coat with large mother-of-pearl buttons. The ominous green-pointed jockey whip was held between his knees, as with folded arms he lolled carelessly in the carriage, trying to look comfortable and unconcerned.

" Mornin', Flintoff, how are ye?" cried Sir Moses, waving his hand from his loftier vehicle, as they drew up.

" Mornin', Heslop, how goes it? Has anybody seen anything of Monsieur?" asked he, without waiting for an answer to either of these important inquiries.

" He's coming, Sir Moses," cried several voices, and presently the Marseillaise hymn of liberty was borne along on the southerly breeze, and Jack's faded black hunting-cap was seen bobbing up and down in the crowd that encircled him, as he rode along on Paul Straddler's shooting pony.

Jack had been at the brandy bottle, and had imbibed just enough to make him excessively noisy.

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"Three cheers for Monsieur Jean Rougier, de next Emperor of de French!" cried he, rising in his stirrups, as he approached the crowd, taking off his old brown hunting-cap, and waving it triumphantly, "Three cheers for de best foxer, de best fencer, de best fighter in all Europe!" and at a second flourish of the cap the crowd came into the humour of the thing, and cheered him lustily. And then of course it was one cheer more for Monsieur; and one cheer more he got.

"Three cheers for ould England!" then demanded Mr. Gallon on behalf of Mr. Flintoff, which being duly responded to, he again asked "What onybody would do 'boot it Frenchman?"

"Now, gentlemen," cried Sir Moses, standing erect in his dog-cart, and waving his hand for silence: "Now, gentlemen, listen to me!" Instead of which somebody roared out, "Three cheers for Sir Moses!" and at it they went again, *Hooray, hooray, hooray*, for when an English mob once begins cheering, it never knows when to stop. "Now, gentlemen, listen to me," again cried he, as soon as the noise had subsided. "It's one o'clock, and it's time to proceed to business. I called you here that there might be no unnecessary trespass or tampering with the ground, and I think I've chosen a line that will enable you all to see without risk to yourselves or injury to anyone" (applause, mingled with a tinkling of the little bells). "Well now," added he, "follow me, and I'll show you the way;" so saying, he resumed his seat, and passing through the gate turned short to the right, taking the diagonal road leading down the hill, in the direction of Featherbedfordshire.

"Where can it be?" was then the cry.

"I know," replied one of the know-everything ones.

"Rainford, for a guinea!" exclaimed Mr. Gallon, fighting with Tippy Tom, who wanted to be back.

"I say Rushworth!" rejoined Mr. Heslop, cutting in before him.

"Nothin' o' the sort!" asserted Mr. Buckwheat; "he's for Harlingson Green to a certainty."

The heterogeneous cavalcade then fell into line, the vehicles and pedestrians keeping the road, while the horsemen spread

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out on either side of the open common, with the spirit of speculation divided between where the race was to be and who was to win.

Thus they descended the hill and joined the broad, once well-kept turnpike, whose neglected milestones still denoted the distance between London and Hinton—London so many miles on one side, Hinton so many miles on the other—things fast passing into the regions of antiquity. Sir Moses now put on a little quicker, and passing through the village of Nettleton and clearing the plantation beyond, a long strip of country lay open to the eye, hemmed in between the parallel lines of the old road and the new Crumpletin Railway.

He then pulled up on the rising ground, and, placing his whip in the socket, stood up to wait the coming of the combatants, to point them out the line he had fixed for the race. The spring tide of population flowed in apace, and he was presently surrounded with horsemen, gigmen, footmen, and bellmen as before.

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CHAPTER LXIV.

THE LINE OF COUNTRY FOR THE RACE.



“OW, gentlemen!” cried Sir Moses, addressing Mr. Flintoff and Monsieur, who were again ranged on either side of his dog-cart: “Now, gentlemen, you see the line before you. The stacks, on the right here,” pointing to a row of wheat stacks in the adjoining field, “are the starting post, and you have to make your ways as straight as ever you can to Lawristone Clump yonder,” pointing to a clump of dark Scotch firs standing against the clear blue sky, on a little round hill, about the middle of a rich old pasture on Thrivewell Farm, the clump being now rendered more conspicuous by sundry vehicles clustered about its base, the fair inmates of which had received a private hint from Sir Moses where to go to. The Baronet always played up to the fair, with whom he flattered himself he was a great favourite.

“Now then, you see,” continued he, “you can’t get wrong, for you’ve nothing to do but to keep between the lines of the rail and the road, on to neither of which must you come; and now you gentlemen,” continued he, addressing the spectators generally, “there’s not the slightest occasion for any of you to go off the road, for you’ll see a great deal better on it, and save both your own necks and the farmers’ crops; so just let me advise you to keep where you are, and follow the jockeys field by field as they go. And now, gentlemen,” continued he, again addressing the competitors, “having said all I have to say on the subject, I advise you to get your horses and make a start

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of it, for though the day is fine it's still winter, you'll remember, and there are several ladies waiting for your coming." So saying, Sir Moses soused down in his seat, and prepared to watch the proceedings.

Mr. Flintoff was the first to peel; and his rich orange and white silk jacket, natty doeskins, and paper-like boots, showed that he had got himself up as well with a due regard to elegance as to lightness. He even emptied some halfpence out of his pockets, in order that he might not carry extra weight. He would, however, have been a great deal happier at home. There was no "yoicks, wind him," or "yoicks, push 'im up," in him now.

Monsieur did not show to so much advantage as Cuddy; but still he was a good deal better attired than he was out hunting on the Crooked-Billet day. He still retained the old brown cap, but in lieu of the shabby scarlet, pegtop trowsers and opera boots, he sported a red silk jacket, a pair of old-fashioned broad-seamed leathers, and mahogany boots—the cap being the property of Sir Moses's huntsman, Tom Findlater, the other articles belonging to Mr. George Gallon of the Rose and Crown. And the sight of them, as Monsieur stripped, seemed to inspirit the lender, for he immediately broke out with the old inquiry, "What does ony body say 'boot it Frenchman?"

"What do *you* say 'boot it Frenchman, Sir Moses?" asked he.

Sir Moses was silent, for he couldn't see his way to a satisfactory investment; so, rising in his seat, he holloaed out to the grooms, who were waiting their orders outside the crowd, to "bring in the horses."

"Make way, there! make way, there!" cried he, as the hooded and sheeted animals approached and made up to their respective riders.

"Take off his nightcap! take off his nightcap!" cried Jack, pulling pettedly at the strings of the hood; "take off his nightcap!" repeated he, stamping furiously, amid the laughter of the bystanders, many of whom had never seen a Frenchman, let alone a mounted one, before.

The obnoxious nightcap being removed, and the striped sheet

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swept over his tail, Mr. Rowley Abingdon's grey horse Mayfly stood showing himself as if he was in a dealer's yard, for as yet he had not ascertained what he was out for. A horse knows when he is going to hunt, or going to exercise, or going to be shod, or going to the public house, but these unaccustomed jaunts puzzle him. Monsieur now proceeded to inform him by clutching at the reins, as he stood preparing for a leg-up on the wrong side.

"The other side, mun, the other side," whispered Paul Straddler in his ear; whereupon Monsieur passed under the horse's head, and appeared as he ought. The movement, however, was not lost on Sir Moses, who forthwith determined to back Cuddy. Cuddy might be bad, but Monsieur must be worse, he thought.

"I'll lay an even five on Mr. Flintoff!" cried he in a loud and audible voice. "I'll lay an even five on Mr. Flintoff," repeated he, looking boldly round. "Gallon, what say you?" asked he, appealing to the hero of the white horse.

"Can't be done, Sir Moses, can't be done," replied Gallon, grinning from ear to ear, with a shake of his great bull head. "Tak yeer three to two if you loike," added he, anxious to be on.

Sir Moses now shook his head in return.

"Back myself, two pound ten—forty shillin', to beat dis serene and elegant Englishman!" exclaimed Jack, now bumping up and down in his saddle as if to establish a seat.

"Do you owe him any wages?" asked Sir Moses of Billy in an undertone, wishing to ascertain what chance there was of being paid if he won.

"Yarse, I owe him some," replied Billy; but how much he couldn't say, not having had Jack's book lately.

Sir Moses caught at the answer, and the next time Jack offered to back himself, he was down upon him with a "Done!" adding, "I'll lay you an even pund if you like."

"Vith all my heart, Sare Moses Baronet," replied Jack gaily; adding, "you are de most engagin', agreeable mans I knows; a perfect beauty vidout de paint."

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Gallon now saw his time was come, and he went at Sir Moses with a “Weell, coom, ar’le lay ye an even foive.”

“Done!” cried the Baronet.

“A tenner, if you loike!” continued Gallon, waxing valiant. Sir Moses shook his head.

“Get me von vet sponge, get me von vet sponge,” now exclaimed Jack, looking about for the groom.

“Wet sponge! What the deuce do you want with a wet sponge?” demanded Sir Moses with surprise.

“Vet sponge, just damp my knees leetle—make me stick on better,” replied Jack, turning first one knee and then the other out of the saddle to get sponged.

“O dom it, if it’s come to that, I may as well have the ten,” muttered Sir Moses to himself. So, nodding to Gallon, he said, “I’ll make it ten.”

“Done!” said Gallon, with a nod, and the bet was made—Done, and Done, being enough between gentlemen.

“Now, then,” cried Sir Moses, stepping down from his dog-cart, “come into the field, and I’ll start you.”

Away then the combatants went, and the betting became brisk in the ring. Mr. Flintoff the favourite at evens.

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CHAPTER LXV.

THE RACE ITSELF.



"There they go!"

ROM the Netleton corn stacks to Lawristone Clump was under two miles, and, barring Bendibus Brook, there was nothing formidable in the line—nothing at least to a peaceably disposed man pursuing the even tenor of

his way, either on horseback or in his carriage, along the deserted London Road. Very different, however, did the landscape now appear to our friend Cuddy Flintoff, as he saw it stretching away in diminishing perspective, presenting an alternating course of husbandry — stubble after grass, wheat after stubble, seeds after wheat, with perhaps pasture again after fallow. Bendibus, too, as its name indicates, seemed to be here, there, and everywhere; here, as shown by the stone bridge on the road—there, as marked by the

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pollard willows lower down—and generally wherever there was an inconvenient breadth and irregularity of fence. The more Mr. Flintoff looked at the landscape the less he liked it. Still he had a noble horse under him in General Havelock—a horse that could go through deep as fast as he could over grass, and that only required holding together and sitting on to carry him safe over his fences. It was just that, however, that Cuddy couldn't master. He couldn't help fancying that the horse would let him down, and he didn't like the idea.

Mayfly, on the other hand, was rather skittish, and began prancing and capering as soon as he got off the road into the field.

"Get 'im by de nob! get 'im by de nob!" cried Jack, setting up his shoulders. "Swing 'im round by de tail! swing 'im round by de tail!" continued he, as the horse still turned away from his work.

"Ord dom it, that's that nasty crazy brute of old Rowley Abingdon's, I do declare!" exclaimed Sir Moses, getting out of the now plunging horse's way. "Didn't know the beggar since he was clipped. That's the brute that killed poor Cherisher,—best hound in my pack. Take care, Monsieur! that horse will eat you if he gets you off."

"Eat me!" cried Jack, pretending alarm; "dat vod be vare unkind."

Sir Moses. "Unkind or not, he'll do it, I assure you."

"Oh, dear! oh, dear!" cried Jack, as the horse laid back his ears, and gave a sort of wincing kick.

"I'll tell you what," cried Sir Moses, emboldened by Jack's fear, "I'll lay you a crown you don't get over the brook."

"Crown, sare! I have no crowns," replied Jack, pulling the horse round. "I'll lay ye sovereign—von pon ten, if you like."

"Come, I'll make it ten shillings, I'll make it ten shillings," replied Sir Moses; adding, "Mr. Flintoff is my witness."

"Done!" cried Monsieur. "Done! I takes the vager. Von pon I beats old Cuddy to de clomp, ten shillin' I gets over de brook."

"All right!" rejoined Sir Moses, "all right! Now,"

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continued he, clapping his hands, “get your horses together—one, two, three, and *away!*”

Up bounced Mayfly in the air; away went Cuddy amidst the cheers and shouts of the roadsters—“*Flintoff! Flintoff! Flintoff! The yaller! the yaller! the yaller!*” followed by a general rush along the grass-grown Macadamised road between London and Hinton.

“Oh, dat is your game, is it?” asked Jack as Mayfly, after a series of minor evolutions, subsided on all fours in a sort of attitude of attention. “Dat is your game, is it?” saying which he just took him short by the head, and, pressing his knees closely into the saddle, gave him such a couple of persuasive digs with his spurs as sent him bounding away after the General. “*Go it, Frenchman!*” was now the cry.

“Go it, aye he *can* go it,” muttered Jack, as the horse now dropped on the bit, and laid himself out for work. He was soon in the wake of his opponent.

The first field was a well drained wheat stubble, with a newly plashed fence on the ground between it and the adjoining pasture; which, presenting no obstacle, they both went at it as if bent on contending for the lead, Monsieur *sacréing*, grinning, and grimacing, after the manner of his adopted country; while Mr. Flintoff sailed away in the true jockey style, thinking he was doing the thing uncommonly well.

Small as the fence was, however, it afforded Jack an opportunity of shooting into his horse’s shoulders, which Cuddy perceiving, he gave a piercing view holloa, and spurred away as if bent on bidding him good bye. This set Jack on his mettle; and getting back into his seat he gathered his horse together and set to, elbows and legs, elbows and legs, in a way that looked very like frenzy.

The *feint* of a fall, however, was a five-pound note in Mr. Gallon’s way, for Jack did it so naturally that there was an immediate backing of Cuddy. “*Flintoff! Flintoff! Flintoff! The yaller! the yaller! the yaller!*” was again the cry.

The pasture was sound, and they sped up it best pace, Mr. Flintoff well in advance.



The great Match between Mr. Knott & Mr. St. John

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The fence out was nothing either—a young quick fence set on the ground, which Cuddy flew in Leicestershire style, throwing up his right arm as he went. Monsieur was soon after him with a high bucking jump.

They were now upon plough,—undrained plough, too, which the recent rains had rendered sticky and holding. General Havelock could have crossed it at score, but the ragged boundary fence of Thrivewell Farm now appearing in view, Mr. Flintoff held him well together, while he scanned its rugged irregularities for a place.

“These are the nastiest fences in the world,” muttered Cuddy to himself, “and I’ll be bound to say there’s a great yawning ditch either on this side or that. Dash it! I wish I was over,” continued he, looking up and down for an exit. There was very little choice. Where there weren’t great mountain ash or alder growers laid into the fence, there were bristling hazel uprights, which presented little more attraction. Altogether it was not a desirable obstacle. Even from the road it looked like something. “*Go it, Cuddy! Go it!*” cried Sir Moses, now again in his dog-cart, from the midst of the crowd, adding, “*It’s nothing of a place!*”

“Isn’t it,” muttered Cuddy, still looking up and down, adding, “I wish you had it instead of me.”

“Ord dom it, go at it like a man!” now roared the Baronet, fearing for his investments. “Go at it for the honour of the hunt! for the honour of Hit-im and Hold-im shire!” continued he, nearly stamping the bottom of his dog-cart out. The mare started forward at the sound, and catching Tippy Tom with the shafts in the side, nearly upset Geordey Gallon, who, like Sir Moses, was holloaing on the Frenchman. There was then a mutual exchange of compliments. Meanwhile Cuddy, having espied a weak bush-stopped gap in a bend of the hedge, now walks his horse quietly up to it, who takes it in a matter-of-course sort of way that as good as says, “What *have* you been making such a bother about?” He then gathers himself together, and shoots easily over the wide ditch on the far side, Cuddy hugging himself at its depth as he lands.

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Monsieur then exclaiming, "Dem it, I vill not make two bites of von cherry," goes at the same place at the rate of twenty miles an hour, and beat beside Cuddy ere the latter had well recovered from his surprise at the feat. "Ord rot it!" exclaimed he, starting round, "what d'ye mean by following a man that way? If I'd fallen, you'd ha' been a-top of me to a certainty."

"Oh, never fear," replied Monsieur, grinning and flourishing his whip. "Oh, never fear, I vod have 'elped you to pick up de pieces."

"Pick up the pieces, sir!" retorted Cuddy angrily, "I don't want to pick up the pieces. I want to ride the race as it should be."

"Come then, old cock," cried Monsieur, spurring past, "you shall jomp 'pon me if you can.". So saying, Jack hustled away over a somewhat swampy enclosure, and popping through an open bridle gate, led the way into a large rich alluvial pasture beyond.

Jack's feat at the boundary fence, coupled with the manner in which he now sat and handled his horse, caused a revulsion of feeling on the road, and Gallon's stentorian roar of "The Frenchman! the Frenchman!" now drowned the vociferations on behalf of Mr. Flintoff and the "yaller." Sir Moses bit his lips and ground his teeth with undisguised dismay. If Flintoff let the beggar beat him, he—he didn't know what he would do. "Flintoff! Flintoff!" shrieked he, as Cuddy again took the lead.

And now dread Bendibus appears in view! There was no mistaking its tortuous sinuosities, even if the crowd on the bridge had not kept vociferating, "The bruk! the bruk!"

"The bruk be hanged!" growled Cuddy, hardening his heart for the conflict. "The bruk be hanged!" repeated he, eyeing its varying curvature, adding, "if ever I joke with any man under the rank of a duke again, may I be capitally D'd. Ass that I was," continued he, "to take a liberty with this confounded Frenchman, who cares no more for his neck than a frog. Dashed if ever I joke with any man under the rank



"THE BRUK! THE BRUK!"

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of a prince of the blood royal," added he, weaving his eyes up and down the brook for a place.

"*Go at it full tilt!*" now roars Sir Moses from the bridge; "go at it full tilt for the honour of Hit-im and Hold-im shire!"

"Honour of Hit-im and Hold-im shire be hanged!" growled Cuddy; "who'll pay for my neck if I break it, I wonder!"

"Cut along, old cock of vax!" now cries Monsieur, grinning up on the grey. "Cut along, old cock of vax, or I'll be into your pocket."

"*Shove him along!*" roars stentorian-lunged Gallon, standing erect in his stirrups, and waving Monsieur on with his hat. "*Shove him along!*" repeats he, adding, "he'll take it in his stride."

Mayfly defers to the now checked General, who, accustomed to be ridden freely, lays back his vexed ears for a kick, as Monsieur hurries up. Cuddy still contemplates the scene, anxious to be over, but dreading to go. "Nothing so nasty as a brook," says he; "never gets less but may get larger." He then scans it attentively. There is a choice of ground, but it is choice of evils, of which it is difficult to choose the least when in a hurry.

About the centre are sedgy rushes, indicative of a bad taking off, while the weak place next the ash involves the chance of a crack of the crown against the hanging branch, and the cattle gap higher up may be mended with wire rope, or stopped with some awkward invisible stuff. Altogether it is a trying position, especially with the eyes of England upon him from the bridge and road.

"Oh, go at it, mun!" roars Sir Moses, agonised at his hesitation; "Oh, go at it, mun! It's *nothin'* of a place!"

"Isn't it," muttered Cuddy; "wish you were at it instead of me." So saying he gathers his horse together in an undecided sort of way, and Monsieur charging at the moment, lands Cuddy on his back in the field and himself in the brook.

Then a mutual roar arose, as either party saw its champion in distress.

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“Stick to him, Cuddy ! stick to him !” roars Sir Moses.

“Stick to him, Mouncheer ! stick to him !” vociferates Mr. Gallon on the other side.

They do as they are bid ; Mr. Flintoff remounting just as Monsieur scrambles out of the brook, and Cuddy’s blood now being roused, he runs the General gallantly at it, and lands, hind legs and all, on the opposite bank. Loud cheers followed the feat.

It is now anybody’s race, and the vehemence of speculation is intense.

“The red!”—“The yaller! the yaller!”—“The red!” Mr. Gallon is frantic, and Tippy Tom leads the way along the turnpike as if he, too, was in the race. Sir Moses’s mare breaks into a canter, and makes the action of the gig resemble that of a boat going to sea. The crowd rush pell-mell without looking where they are going ; it is a wonder that nobody is killed.

Lawristone Clump is now close at hand, enlivened with the gay parasols and colours of the ladies.

There are but three more fences between the competitors and it, and seeing what he thinks a weak place in the next, Mr. Flintoff races for it over the sound furrows of the deeply-drained pasture. As he gets nearer it begins to look larger, and Cuddy’s irresolute handling makes the horse swerve.

“Now then, old stoopid !” cries Jack, in a good London cabman’s accent ; “Now then, old stoopid ! vot are ye stargazing that way for ? Vy don’t ye go over or get out o’ de vay ?”

“Go yourself,” growled Cuddy, pulling his horse round.

“Go myself !” repeated Jack ; “’ow the doose can I go vid your great carcase stuck i’ the vay !”

“My great carcase stuck i’ the way !” retorted Cuddy, spurring and hauling at his horse. “My great carcase stuck in the way ! Look at your own, and be hanged to ye !”

“Vell, look at it !” replied Jack, backing his horse for a run, and measuring his distance, he clapped spurs freely in his sides, and going at it full tilt, flew over the fence, exclaiming as he lit, “Dere it is for you to ’zamine.”

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"That feller can ride a deuced deal better than he pretends," muttered Cuddy, wishing his tailorism mightn't be all a trick; saying which he followed Jack's example, and taking a run he presently landed in the next field, amidst the cheers of the roadsters. This was a fallow, deep, wet, and undrained, and his well ribbed-up horse was more than a match for Jack's across it. Feeling he could go, Cuddy set himself home in his saddle, and flourishing his whip, cantered past, exclaiming, "Come along, old stick in the mud!"

"I'll stick i' the mod ye!" replied Jack, hugging and holding his sobbing horse. "I'll stick i' the mod ye! Stop till I gets off dis birdliming field, and I'll give you de go-by, Cuddy, old cock."

Jack was as good as his word, for the ground getting sounder on the slope, he spurted up a wet furrow, racing with Cuddy for the now obvious gap, that afforded some wretched half-starved calves a choice between the rushes of one field and the whicken grass of the other. Pop, Jack went over it, looking back and exclaiming to Cuddy, "Bon jour! top of de mornin' to you, sare!" as he hugged his horse and scuttled up a high-backed ridge of the sour blue and yellow-looking pasture.

The money was now in great jeopardy, and the people on the road shouted and gesticulated the names of their respective favourites with redoubled energy, as if their eagerness could add impetus to the animals. "*Flintoff! Flintoff! Flintoff!*" "*The Frenchman! the Frenchman!*" as Monsieur at length dropped his hands and settled into something like a seat. On, on, they went, Monsieur every now and then looking back to see that he had a proper space between himself and his pursuer, and giving his horse a good dig with his spurs, he lifted him over a stiff stake-and-rice fence that separated him from the field with the Clump.

"Here they come!" is now the cry on the hill, and fair faces at length turn to contemplate the gallopers, who come sprawling up the valley in the unsightly way fore-shortened horses appear to do. The road gate on the right flies suddenly open, and Tippy Tom is seen running away with Geordey

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Gallon, who just manages to manoeuvre him round the Clump to the front as Monsieur comes swinging in an easy winner.

Glorious victory for Geordey! Glorious victory for Monsieur! They can't have won less than thirty pounds between them, supposing they get paid, and that Geordey gives Jack his "reglars." Well may Geordey throw up his shallow hat and hug the winner. But who shall depict the agony of Sir Moses at this dreadful blow to his finances? The way he dom'd Cuddy, the way he dom'd Jack, the way he swung frantically about Lawristone Clump, declaring he was ruined for ever and ever! After thinking of everybody at all equal to the task, we are obliged to get our old friend Echo to answer "Who!"

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CHAPTER LXVI.

HENEREY BROWN & CO. AGAIN.



A Stern Chase!

HE first paroxysm of rage being over, Sir Moses remounted his dog-cart, and drove rapidly off, seeming to take pleasure in making his boy-groom (who was at the mare's head) run after it as long as he could.

"What's it Baronet off?" exclaimed Mr. Gallon, staring with astonishment at the fast-receding vehicle; "what's it Baronet off?" repeated he, thinking he would have to go to Pangburn Park for his money.

"O dear, Thir Mothes is gone!" lisped pretty Miss Mechlinton, who wanted to have a look at our hero, Mr. Pringle, who she heard was frightfully handsome, and alarmingly rich. And the ladies, who had been too much occupied with the sudden rush of excited people to notice Sir Moses's movements, wondered

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what had happened that he didn't come to give his tongue an airing among them as usual. One said he had got the tooth-ache; another, the ear-ache; a third, that he had got something in his eye; while a satirical gentleman said it looked more like a B. in his bonnet.

"Ony hoo," however, as Mr. Gallon would say, Sir Moses was presently out of the field and on to the hard turnpike again.

We need scarcely say that Mr. Pringle's ride home with him was not of a very agreeable character; indeed, the Baronet had seldom been seen to be so put out of his way, and the mare came in for frequent salutations with the whip—latitudinally, longitudinally, and horizontally, over the head and ears, accompanied by cutting commentaries on Flintoff's utter uselessness and inability to do anything but drink.

He "never saw such a man—domd if ever he did," and he whipped the mare again in confirmation of the opinion.

Nor did matters mend on arriving at home; for here Mr. Mordecai Nathan met him in the entrance hall, with a very doleful face, to announce that Henerey Brown & Co., who had long been coddling up their horses, had that morning succeeded in sloping with them and their stock to Halterley Fair, and selling them in open market, leaving a note hanging to the key in the house-door, saying that they had gone to Horseterhaylia, where Sir Moses needn't trouble to follow them.

"Ond dom it!" shrieked the Baronet, jumping up in the air like a stricken deer; "ond dom it! I'm robbed! I'm robbed! I'm ruined! I'm ruined!" and tottering to an arm-chair, he sank, overpowered with the blow. Henerey Brown & Co. had indeed been too many for him. After a long course of retrograding husbandry, they seemed all at once to have turned over a new leaf, if not in the tillage way, at all events in that still better way for the land, the cattle line,—store stock, with some symptoms of beef on their bones, and sheep with whole fleeces, going on all-fours depastured the fields, making Mordecai Nathan think it was all the fruits of his superior management. Alack a-day! They belonged to a friend of Lawyer Hindmarch's, who thought Henerey Brown & Co. might as well

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eat all off the land ere they left. And so they eat it as bare as a board.

"Ond dom it, how came you to let them escape?" now demanded the Baronet, wringing his hands in despair; "ond dom it, how came you to let them escape?" continued he, throwing himself back in the chair.

"Why really, Sir Moses, I was perfectly deceived; I thought they were beginning to do better, for though they were back with their ploughing, they seemed to be turning their attention to stock, and I was in hopes that in time they would pull round."

"Pull round!" ejaculated the Baronet; "pull round! They'll flatten me I know with their pulling;" and thereupon he kicked out both legs before him as if he was done with them altogether.

His seat being in the line of the door, a rude draught now caught his shoulder, which making him think it was no use sitting there to take cold and the rheumatism, he suddenly bounced up, and telling Nathan to stay where he was, he ran up-stairs, and quickly changed his fine satiney, velvety, holiday garments, for a suit of dingy old tweeds, that looked desperately in want of the washing-tub. Then surmounting the whole with a drab wide-awake, he clutched a knotty dog-whip, and set off on foot with his agent to the scene of disaster, rehearsing the licking he would give Henerey with the whip if he caught him, as he went.

Away he strode, as if he was walking a match, down Dolly's Close, over the stile, into Farmer Hayford's fields, and away by the back of the lodges, through Orwell Plantation and Lowestoft End, into the Rushworth and Mayland Road.

Doblington farm-house then stood on the rising ground before him. It was indeed a wretched, dilapidated, woe-begone-looking place; bad enough when enlivened with the presence of cattle and the other concomitants of a farm; but now with only a poor white pigeon, that Henerey Brown & Co., as if in bitter irony, had left behind them, it looked the very picture of misery and poverty-stricken desolation.

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It was red-tiled and had been rough-cast, but the casting was fast coming off, leaving fine map-like tracings of green damp on the walls,—a sort of map of Italy on one side of the door, a map of Africa on the other, one of Horseterhaylia about the centre, with a perfect battery of old hats bristling in the broken panes of the windows. Nor was this all; for, by way of saving coals, Henerey & Humphrey had consumed all the available wood about the place—stable-fittings, cow-house-fittings, pig-sty-fittings, even part of the staircase—and acting under the able advice of Lawyer Hindmarch, had carried away the pot and oven from the kitchen, and all the grates from the fire-places, under pretence of having bought them of the outgoing tenant when they entered,—a fact that the lawyer said “would be difficult to disprove.” If it had not been that Henerey Brown & Co. had been sitting rent-free, and that the dilapidated state of the premises formed an excellent subject of attack for parrying payment when rent came to be demanded, it would be difficult to imagine people living in a house where they had to wheel their beds about to get to the least drop-exposed quarter, and where the ceilings bagged down from the rafters like old-fashioned window-hangings. People, however, can put up with a great deal when it saves their own pockets. Master and man having surveyed the exterior then entered.

“Well,” said Sir Moses, looking round on the scene of desolation, “they’ve made a clean sweep at all events.”

“They have that,” assented Mr. Mordecai Nathan.

“I wonder it didn’t strike you, when you caught them selling their straw off at night, that they would be doing something of this sort,” observed Sir Moses.

“Why, I thought it rather strange,” replied Mr. Nathan; “only they assured me that for every load of straw they sold, they brought back double the value in guano, or I certainly should have been more on the alert.”

“Guano be hanged!” rejoined the Baronet, trying to open the kitchen window, to let some fresh air into the foul apartment; “guano be hanged! one ton of guano makes itself into twenty ton with the aid of Kentish gravel. No better trade

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than spurious manure-manufacturing ; almost as good as cabbage-cigar making. Besides," continued he, "the straw goes off to a certainty, whereas there's no certainty about the guano coming back instead of it. Oh, dom it, man," continued he, knocking some of the old hats out of the broken panes, after a fruitless effort to open the window, "I'd have walked the bailiffs into the beggars if I could have foreseen this."

"So would I, Sir Moses," replied Mr. Nathan ; "only who could we get to come in their place ? "

That observation of Mr. Mordecai Nathan comprises a great deal, and accounts for much apparent good landlordism, which lets a bad tenant go on from year to year with the occasional payment of a driblet of rent, instead of ejecting him ; the real fact being that the landlord knows there is no one to get to come in his place—no better one at least—and that fact constitutes one of the principal difficulties of land-owning. If a landlord is not prepared to take an out-of-order farm into his own hands, he must either put up with an incompetent non-paying tenant, or run the risk of getting a worse one from the general body of outlying incompetence. A farm will always let for something.

There is a regular rolling stock of bad farmers in every country, who pass from district to district, exercising their ingenuity in extracting whatever little good their predecessors have left in the land. These men are the steady, determined enemies to grass. Their great delight is to get leave to plough out an old pasture-field under pretence of laying it down better. There won't be a grass field on a farm but what they will take some exception to, and ask leave to have "out" as they call it. Then if they get leave, they take care never to have a good take of seeds, and so plough on and plough on, promising to lay it down better after each fresh attempt, just as a thimble-rigger urges his dupe to go on and go on, and try his luck once more, until land and dupe are both fairly exhausted. The tenant then marches, and the thimble-rigger decamps, each in search of fresh fields and flats new.

Considering that all writers on agriculture agree that grass

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land pays double, if not treble, what arable land does, and that one is so much more beautiful to the eye than the other, to say nothing of pleasanter to ride over, we often wonder that landlords have not turned their attention more to the increase and encouragement of grass land on their estates than they have done.

To be sure they have always had the difficulty to contend with that we have named, viz., a constant hankering on the part of even some good tenants to plough it out. A poor grass field, like Gay's hare, seems to have no friends. Each man proposes to improve it by ploughing it out, forgetful of the fact, that it may also be improved by manuring the surface. The quantity of arable land on a farm is what puts landlords so much in the power of bad farmers. If farms consisted of three parts grass and one part plough, instead of three parts plough and one part grass, no landlord need ever put up with an indifferent, incompetent tenant; for the grass would carry him through, and he could either let the farm off, field by field, to butchers and graziers, or pasture it himself, or hay it if he liked. Nothing pays better than hay. A very small capital would then suffice for the arable land; and there being, as we said before, a rolling stock of scratching land starvers always on the look-out for out-of-order farms, so every landowner should have a rolling stock of horses and farm-implements ready to turn upon any one that is not getting justice done it. There is no fear of gentlemen being overloaded with land; for the old saying, "It's a good thing to follow the laird," will always insure plenty of applicants for any farm a landlord is leaving—supposing, of course, that he has been doing it justice himself, which we must say landlords always do; the first result we see of a gentleman farming being the increase of the size of his stock-yard, and this oftentimes in the face of a diminished acreage under the plough.

Then see what a saving there is in grass farming compared to tillage husbandry: no ploughs, no harrows, no horses, no lazy leg-dragging clowns, who require constant watching; the cattle will feed whether master is at home or polishing St. James's Street in paper boots and a tight bearing-rein.

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Again, the independence of the grass farmer is so great. When the wind howls and the rain beats, and the torrents roar, and John Flail lies quaking in bed, fearing for his corn, then old Tom Nebuchadnezzar turns quietly over on his side like the Irish jontleman who, when told the house was on fire, replied, “Arrah, by Jasus, I’m only a lodger ! ” and says, “ ‘Ord rot it, let it rain ; it’ll do me no harm ! I’m only a grass-grower ! ”

But we are leaving Sir Moses in the midst of his desolation, with nothing but the chilly fog of a winter’s evening and his own bright thoughts to console him.

“ And dom it, I’m off,” exclaimed he, fairly overcome with the impurity of the place; and hurrying out, he ran away towards home, leaving Mr. Mordecai Nathan to lock the empty house up, or not, just as he liked.

And to Pangburn Park let us now follow the Baronet, and see what our friend Billy is about.

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CHAPTER LXVII.

THE PRINGLE CORRESPONDENCE.



R. PRINGLE'S return was greeted with an immense shoal of letters, one from Mamma, one with "Yammerton Grange" on the seal, two from his tailors—one with the following simple heading, "To bill delivered," so much; the other containing a vast catalogue of what a jury of tailors would consider youthful "necessaries," amounting in the whole to a pretty round sum, accompanied by an intimation, that in consequence of the tightness of the money-market, an early settlement would be agreeable—and a very important-looking package, that had required a couple of heads to convey, and which, being the most mysterious of the whole, after a due feeling and inspection, he at length opened. It was from his obsequious friend Mr. Smoothley, and contained a printed copy of the rules of the Hit-im and Hold-im shire Hunt, done up in a little red-backed yellow-lined book, with a note from the sender, drawing Mr. Pringle's attention to the tenth rule, which stipulated that the annual club subscription of fifteen guineas was to be paid into Greedy and Griper's bank, in Hinton, by Christmas-day in each year at latest, or ten per cent. interest would be charged on the amount after that.

"Fi-fi-fifteen guineas! te-te-ten per cent.!" ejaculated Billy, gasping for breath; who'd ever have thought of such a thing!" and it was some seconds before he sufficiently recovered his composure to resume his reading. The rent of the cover he

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had taken, Mr. Smoothley proceeded to say, was eight guineas a-year. "Eight guineas a-year!" again ejaculated Billy; "eight guineas a-year! why I thought it was a mere matter of form. Oh dear, I can't stand this!" continued he, looking vacantly about him. "Surely, risking one's neck is quite bad enough, without paying for doing so. Lord Ladythorne never asked me for any money, why should Sir Moses? Oh dear, oh dear! I wish I'd never embarked in such a speculation. Nothing to be made by it, but a great deal to be lost. Bother the thing, I wish I was out of it," with which declaration he again ventured to look at Mr. Smoothley's letter. It went on to say, that the rent would not become payable until the next season, Mr. Treadcroft being liable for that year's rent. "Ah well, come, that's some consolation, at all events," observed our friend, looking up again; "that's some consolation, at all events," adding, "I'll take deuced good care to give it up before another year comes round."

Smoothley then touched upon the more genial subject of the hunt-buttons. He had desired Garnet, the silversmith, to send a couple of sets off the last die, one for Billy's hunting, the other for his dress coat; and he concluded by wishing our friend a long life of health and happiness to wear them with the renowned Hit-im and Hold-im shire hunt; and assuring him that he was always his, with great sincerity, John Smoothley. "Indeed," said Billy, throwing the letter down; "more happiness if I don't wear them," continued he, conning over his many misfortunes, and the great difficulty he had in sitting at the jumps. "However," thought he, "the dress ones will do for the balls," with which not uncommon consolation he broke the red seal of the Yammerton Grange letter.

This was from our friend the Major, all about a wonderful hunt his "haryers" had had, which he couldn't resist the temptation of writing to tell Billy of. The description then sprawled over four sides of letter paper, going an arrant burst from end to end, there not being a single stop in the whole, whatever there might have been in the hunt; and the Major concluded by saying, that it was by far the finest run he had

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ever seen during his long mastership, extending over a period of five-and-thirty years.

Glancing his eye over its contents, how they found at Conksbury Corner, and ran at a racing pace without a check to Foremark Hill, and down over the water-meadows at Dove-dale Green to Marbury Hall, turning short at Fullbrook Folly, and over the race-course at Ancaster Lawn, doubling at Dinton Dean, and back over the hill past Oakhanger Gorse to Tufton Holt, where they killed, the account being interwoven, parenthesis within parenthesis, with the brilliant hits and performances of Lovely, and Lilter, and Dainty, and Bustler, and others, with the names of the distinguished party who were out, our old friend Wotherspoon among the number, Billy came at last to a sly postscript, saying that "his bed and stall were quite ready for him whenever he liked to return, and they would all be delighted to see him." The wording of the Postscript had taken a good deal of consideration, and had undergone two or three revisions at the hands of the ladies before they gave it to the Major to add—one wanting to make it rather stronger, another rather milder, the Major thinking they had better have a little notice before Mr. Pringle returned, while Mamma (who had now got all the linen up again) inclined, though she did not say so before the girls, to treat Billy as one of the family. Upon a division whether the word "quite" should stand part of the Postscript or not, the Major was left in a minority, and the pressing word passed. His bed and stall were "quite ready," instead of only "ready" to receive him. Miss Yammerton observing, that "quite" looked as if they really wished to have him, while "ready" looked as if they did not care whether he came or not. And Billy, having pondered awhile on the Postscript, which he thought came very opportunely, proceeded to open his last letter, a man always taking those he doesn't know first.

This letter was Mamma's—poor Mamma's—written in the usual strain of anxious earnestness, hoping her beloved was enjoying himself, but hinting that she would like to have him back. Butterfingers was gone, she had got her a place in Somersetshire, so anxiety on that score was over. Mrs. Pringle's

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peculiar means of information, however, informed her that the Misses Yammerton were dangerous, and she had already expressed her opinion pretty freely with regard to Sir Moses. Indeed, she didn't know which house she would soonest hear of her son being at — Sir Moses's with his plausible pocket-guarding plundering, or Major Yammerton's, with the three pair of enterprising eyes, and Mamma's mature judgment directing the siege operations. Mrs. Pringle wished he was either back at Tantivy Castle, or in Curtain Crescent again.

Still she did not like to be too pressing, but observed, as Christmas was coming, when hunting would most likely be stopped by the weather, she hoped he would run up to town, where many of his friends, Jack Sheppard, Tom Brown, Harry Bean, and others, were asking for him, thinking he was lost. She also said, it would be a good time to go to Uncle Jerry's and try to get a settlement with him, for though she had often called, sometimes by appointment, she had never been able to meet with him, as he was always away, either seeing after some chapel he was building, or attending a meeting for the conversion of the Sepoys, or some other fanatics.

The letter concluded by saying, that she had looked about in vain for a groom likely to suit him ; for, although plenty had presented themselves from gentlemen wishing for high wages with nothing to do, down to those who would garden and groom and look after cows, she had not seen anything at all to her mind. Mr. Luke Grueler, however, she added, who had called that morning, had told her of one that he could recommend, who was just leaving the Honourable Captain Swellington ; and being on his way to town from Doubleimupshire, where the Captain had got to the end of his tether, he would very possibly call ; and, if so, Billy would know him by his having Mr. Grueler's card to present. And with renewed expressions of affection, and urging him to take care of himself, as well among the leaps as the ladies, she signed herself his most doting and loving "Mamma."

"Groom!" (*humph*) "Swellington!" (*humph*) muttered Billy, folding up the letter, and returning it to its highly-musked

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envelope ; " Wonder what sort of a beggar he'll be ? " continued he, twirling his mustachios ; " Wonder how he'll get on with Rougier ? " and a thought struck him, that he had about as much as he could manage with Monsieur. However, many people have to keep what they don't want, and there is no reason why such an aspiring youth as our friend should be exempt from the penance of his station.

Talking of grooms, we are not surprised at " Mamma's " difficulty in choosing one, for we know of few more difficult selections to make ; and, considering the innumerable books we have on the choice and management of horses, we wonder no one has written on the choice and management of grooms. The truth is, they are as various as the horse-tribe itself ; and, considering that the best horse may soon be made a second-rate one by bad grooming, while a second-rate one may be elevated to the first class by good management, and that a man's neck may be broken by riding a horse not fit to go, it is a matter of no small importance. Some men can dress themselves, some can dress their horses ; but very few can dress both themselves and their horses. Some are only fit to strip a horse and starve him. It is not every baggy-corded fellow that rolls slantly along in top-boots, and hisses at everything he touches, that is a groom.

In truth, there are very few grooms, very few men who really enter into the feelings and constitutions of horses, or look at them otherwise than as they would look at chairs or mahogany tables. A horse that will be perfectly furious under the dressing of one man, will be as quiet as possible in the hands of another —a rough subject thinking the more a horse prances and winces, the greater the reason to lay on. Some fellows have neither hands, nor eyes, nor sense, nor feeling, nor anything. We have seen one ride a horse to cover without ever feeling that he was lame, while a master's eye detected it the moment he came in sight. Indeed, if horses could express their opinions, we fear many of them would have very indifferent ones of their attendants. The greater the reason, therefore, for masters giving honest characters of their servants.

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CHAPTER LXVIII.

MR. GAITERS.



UR friend Mr. Pringle, having read his letters, was swinging up and down the little library, digesting them, when the great Mr. Bankhead bowed in with a card on a silver salver, and announced, in his usual bland way, that the bearer wished to speak to him.

“ Me ! ” exclaimed Billy, wondering who it could be ; “ Me ! ” repeated he, taking the highly-glazed thin pasteboard missive off the tray, and reading, “ Mr. Luke Grueler, Half-moon Street, Piccadilly.”

“ Grueler, Grueler ! ” repeated Billy, frowning and biting his pretty lips ; “ Grueler—I’ve surely heard that name before.”

“ The bearer, sir, comes *from* Mr. Grueler, sir,” observed Mr. Bankhead, in explanation : the party’s own name, sir, is Gaiters ; but he said by bringing in this card, you would probably know who he is.

“ Ah ! to be sure, so I do,” replied Billy, thus suddenly enlightened, “ I’ve just been reading about him. Send him in, will you ? ”

“ If you please, sir,” whispered the bowing Bankhead as he withdrew.

Billy then braced himself up for the coming interview.

A true groom’s knock, a loud and a little one, presently sounded on the white-over-black painted door panel, and at our friend’s “ Come in,” the door opened, when in sidled a sleek-headed well put on groomish-looking man, of apparently forty or five-and-forty years of age. The man bowed respectfully

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which Billy returned, glancing at his legs to see whether they were knock-kneed or bowed, his Mamma having cautioned him against the former. They were neither; on the contrary, straight good legs, well set off with tightish, drab-coloured kerseymere shorts, and continuations to match. His coat was an olive-coloured cutaway, his vest a canary-coloured striped toilanette, with a slightly turned-down collar, showing the whiteness of his well-tied cravat, secured with a gold flying-fox pin. Altogether he was a most respectable looking man, and did credit to the recommendation of Mr. Grueler.

Still he was a groom of pretension—that is to say, a groom who wanted to be master. He was hardly, indeed, satisfied with that, and would turn a gentleman off who ventured to have an opinion of his own on any matter connected with his department. Mr. Gaiters considered that his character was the first consideration, his master's wishes and inclinations the second; so if master wanted to ride, say, Rob Roy, and Gaiters meant him to ride Moonshine, there would be a trial of skill which it should be.

Mr. Gaiters always considered himself corporally in the field, and speculated on what people would be saying of “his horses.”

Some men like to be bullied, some don't, but Gaiters had dropped on a good many who did. Still these are not the lasting order of men, and Gaiters had attended the dispersion of a good many studs at the Corner. Again, some masters had turned him off, while he had turned others off; and the reason of his now being disengaged was that the Sheriff of Doubleimp-upshire had saved him the trouble of taking Captain Swellington's horses to Tattersall's, by selling them off on the spot. Under these circumstances, Gaiters had written to his once former master—or rather employer—Mr. Grueler, to announce his retirement, which had led to the present introduction. Many people will recommend servants who they wouldn't take themselves. Few newly married couples but what have found themselves saddled with invaluable servants that others wanted to get rid of.

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Mutual salutations over, Gaiters now stood in the first position, hat in front, like a heavy father on the stage.

Our friend not seeming inclined to lead the gallop, Mr. Gaiters, after a prefatory hem, thus commenced : “ Mr. Grueler, sir, I presume would tell you, sir, that I would call upon you, sir ? ”

Billy nodded assent.

“ I’m just leaving the Honourable Captain Swellington, of the Royal Hyacinth Hussars, sir, whose regiment is ordered out to India ; and fearing the climate might not agree with my constitution, I have been obliged to give him up.”

“ Ah ! ” ejaculated Billy.

“ I have his testimonials,” continued Gaiters, putting his hat between his legs, and diving into the inside pocket of his cutaway as he spoke. “ I have his testimonials,” repeated he, producing a black, steel-clasped banker or bill-broker’s looking pocket-book, and teding up a lot of characters, bills, recipes, and other documents in the pocket. He then selected Captain Swellington’s character from the medley, written on the best double-thick, cream-laid note paper, sealed with the Captain’s crest—a goose—saying that the bearer John Gaiters was an excellent groom, and might safely be trusted with the management of hunters. “ You’ll probably know who the Captain is, sir,” continued Mr. Gaiters, eying Billy as he read it. “ He’s a son of the Right Honourable Lord Viscount Flareup’s, of Flareup Castle, one of the oldest and best families in the kingdom—few better families anywhere,” just as if the Peer’s pedigree had anything to do with Gaiter’s grooming. “ I have plenty more similar to it,” continued Mr. Gaiters, who had now selected a few out of the number which he held before him, like a hand at cards. “ Plenty more similar to it,” repeated he, looking them over. “ Here is Sir Rufus Rasper’s, Sir Peter Puller’s, Lord Thruster’s, Mr. Cropper’s, and others. Few men have horsed more sportsmen than I have done; and if my principals do not go in the first flight, it is not for want of condition in my horses. Mr. Grueler was the only one I ever had to give up for

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overmarking my horses ; and he was so hard upon them I couldn't stand it ; still he speaks of me, as you see, in the handsomest manner," handing our friend Mr. Grueler's certificate, couched in much the same terms as Captain Swellington's.

"Yarse," replied Billy, glancing over and then returning it, thinking, as he again eyed Mr. Gaiters, that a smart lad like Lord Ladythorne's Cupid without wings would be more in his way than such a full-sized magnificent man. Still his Mamma and Mr. Grueler had sent Gaiters, and he supposed they knew what was right. In truth, Gaiters was one of those overpowering people that make a master feel as if he was getting hired, instead of suiting himself with a servant.

This preliminary investigation over, Gaiters returned the characters to his ample book, and clasping it together, dropped it into his capacious pocket, observing, as it fell, that he should be glad to endeavour to arrange matters with Mr. Pringle, if he was so inclined.

Our friend nodded, wishing he was well rid of him.

"It's not every place I would accept," continued Mr. Gaiters, growing grand ; "for the fact is, as Mr. Grueler will tell you, my character is as good as a Bank of England note ; and unless I was sure I could do myself justice, I should not like to venture on an experiment, for it's no use a man undertaking anything that he's not allowed to carry out his own way ; and nothing would be so painful to my feelings as to see a gentleman not turned out as he should be."

Mr. Pringle drawled a "Yarse," for he wanted to be turned out properly.

"Well, then," continued Mr. Gaiters, changing his hat from his right hand to his left, subsiding into the second position, and speaking slowly and deliberately, "I suppose you want a groom to take the entire charge and management of your stable —a stud groom, in short ?"

"Yarse, I s'pose so," replied Billy, not knowing exactly what he wanted, and wishing his Mamma hadn't sent him such a swell.

"Well, then, sir," continued Mr. Gaiters, casting his eyes

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up to the dirty ceiling, and giving his chin a dry shave with his disengaged hand ; " Well, then, sir, I flatter myself I can fulfil that office with credit to myself, and satisfaction to my employer."

" Yarse," assented Billy, thinking there would be very little satisfaction in the matter.

" Buy the forage, hire the helpers, do everything appertaining to the department—in fact, just as I did with the Honourable Captain Swellington."

" Humph," said Billy, recollecting that his Mamma always told him never to let servants buy anything for him that he could help.

" Might I ask if you buy your own horses ? " inquired Mr. Gaiters, after a pause.

" Why, yarse, I do," replied Billy ; " at least I have so far."

" Hum ! That would be a consideration," muttered Gaiters, compressing his mouth, as if he had now come to an obstacle ; " that would be a consideration. Not that there's any benefit or advantage to be derived from buying horses," continued he, resuming his former tone ; " but when a man's character's at stake, it's agreeable, desirable, in fact, that he should be intrusted with the means of supporting it. I should like to buy the horses," continued he, looking earnestly at Billy, as if to ascertain the amount of his gullibility.

" Well," drawled Billy, " I don't care if you do," thinking there wouldn't be many to buy.

" Oh ! " gasped Gaiters, relieved by the announcement ; he always thought he had lost young Mr. Easyman's place by a similar demand, but still he couldn't help making it. It wouldn't have been doing justice to the Bank of England note character, indeed, if he hadn't.

" Oh ! " repeated he, emboldened by success, and thinking he had met with the right sort of man. He then proceeded to sum up his case in his mind,—forage, helpers, horses, horses, helpers, forage ;—he thought that was all he required ; yes, he thought it was all he required, and the Bank of England note

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character would be properly supported. He then came to the culminating point of the *cash*. Just as he was clearing his throat with a prefatory "*Hem*" for this grand consideration, a sudden rush and banging of doors forboding mischief resounded through the house, and something occurred—that we will tell in another chapter.

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CHAPTER LXIX.

A CATASTROPHE.



“H, Sir, Sir, please step this way ! please step this way !” exclaimed the *delirium tremens* footman, rushing coatless into the room where our hero and Mr. Gaiters were,—his shirt sleeves tucked up, and a knife in hand, as if he had been killing a pig, though in reality he was fresh from the knife-board.

“Oh, Sir, Sir, please step this way !” repeated he, at once demolishing the delicate discussion at which our friend and Mr. Gaiters had arrived.

“What’s ha-ha-happened ?” demanded Billy, turning deadly pale ; for his cares were so few, that he couldn’t direct his fears to any one point in particular.

“Please, sir, your ‘oss has dropped down in a f-f-fit !” replied the man, all in a tremble.

“Fit !” ejaculated Billy, brushing past Gaiters, and hurrying out of the room.

“Fit !” repeated Gaiters, turning round with comfortable composure, looking at the man as much as to say, What do you know about it ?

“Yes, f-f-fit !” repeated the footman, brandishing his knife, and running after Billy as though he were going to slay him.

Dashing along the dark passages, breaking his shins over one of those unlucky coal-skuttles that are always in the way, Billy fell into an outward-bound stream of humanity—Mrs. Margerum, Barbara the housemaid, Mary the laundrymaid, Jones the gardener’s boy, and others, all hurrying to the scene of action.

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Already there was a ring formed round the door, of bare-armed helpers, and miscellaneous hangers-on, looking over each other's shoulders, who opened a way for Billy as he advanced.

The horse was indeed down, but not in a fit; for he was dying, and expired just as Billy entered. There lay the glazy-eyed hundred guinea Napoleon the Great, showing his teeth, reduced to the mere value of his skin; so great is the difference between a dead horse and a live one.

"Bad job!" said Wetun, who was on his knees at its head, looking up; "bad job!" repeated he, trying to look dismal.

"What! is he dead?" demanded Billy, who could hardly realise the fact.

"Dead, ay—he'll never move more," replied Wetun, showing his fast-stiffening neck.

"By Jove! why didn't you send for the doctor?" demanded Billy.

"Doctor! we had the doctor," replied Wetun, "but he could do nothin' for him."

"Nothin' for him!" retorted Billy; "why not?"

"Because he's rotten," replied Wetun.

"Rotten! how can that be?" asked our friend, adding, "I only bought him the other day!"

"If you open 'im you'll find he's as black as ink in his inside," rejoined the groom, now getting up in the stall and rubbing his knees.

"Well, but what's that with?" demanded Billy. "It surely must be owing to something. Horses don't die that way for nothing."

"Owing to a bad constitution—harn't got no stamina," replied Wetun, looking down upon the dead animal.

Billy was posed with the answer, and stood mute for a while.

"That 'oss 'as never been rightly well sin he com'd," now observed Joe Bates, the helper who looked after him, over the heads of the door circle.

"I didn't like his looks when he com'd in from 'unting that day," continued Tom Whisp, another helper.

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"No, nor the day arter nouther," assented Jack Strong, who was [a capital hand at finding fault, and could slur over his work with anybody.

Just then Mr. Gaiters arrived; and a deferential entrance was opened for his broad cloth by the group before the door.

The great Mr. Gaiters entered.

Treating the dirty blear-eyed Wetun more as a helper than an equal, he advanced deliberately up the stall and proceeded to examine the dead horse.

He looked first up his nostrils, next at his eye, then at his neck to see if he had been bled.

"I could have cured that horse if I'd had him in time," observed he to Billy with a shake of the head.

"Neither you nor no man under the sun could ha' done it," asserted Mr. Wetun, indignant at the imputation.

"I could though—at least he never should have been in that state," replied Gaiters coolly.

"I say you couldn't!" retorted Wetun, putting his arms a-kimbo, and sideling up to the daring intruder, a man who hadn't even asked leave to come into his stable.

A storm being imminent, our friend slipped off, and Sir Moses arrived from Henerey Brown & Co.'s just at the nick of time to prevent a fight.

So much for a single night in a bad stable, a result that our readers will do well to remember when they ask their friends to visit them—"Love me, love my horse," being an adage more attended to in former times than it is now.

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CHAPTER LXX.

A TÊTE-À-TÊTE DINNER.



H, my dear Pringle! I'm so sorry to hear about your horse! so sorry to hear about your horse!" exclaimed Sir Moses, rushing forward to greet our friend with a consolatory shake of the hand, as he came sauntering into the library, flat candlestick in hand, before dinner. "It's just the most unfortunate thing I ever knew in my life; and I wouldn't have had it happen at my house for all the money in the world—dom'd if I would," added he, with a downward blow of his fist.

Billy could only reply with one of his usual monotonous "y-a-r-ses."

"However," said the Baronet, "it shall not prevent your hunting to-morrow, for I'll mount you with all the pleasure in the world—all the pleasure in the world," repeated he, with a flourish of his hand.

"Thank ye," replied Billy, alarmed at the prospect; "but the fact is, the Major expects me back at Yammerton Grange, and——"

"That's nothin'!" interrupted Sir Moses; "that's nothin'; hunt, and go there after—all in the day's work. Meet at the kennel, find a fox in five minutes, have your spin, and go to the Grange afterwards."

"O, indeed, yes, you shall," continued he, settling it so, "shall have the best horse in my stable—Pegasus, or Atalanta, or Old Jack, or any of them—dom'd if you shalln't—so that matter's settled."

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"But, but, but," hesitated our alarmed friend, "I—I—I shall have no way of getting there after hunting."

"O, I'll manage that too," replied Sir Moses, now in the generous mood. "I'll manage that too—shall have the dog-cart—the thing we were in to-day; my lad shall go with you and bring it back, and that'll convey you and your traps and all altogether. Only sorry I can't ask you to stay another week, but the fact is I've got to go to my friend Lord Lundyfoote's for Monday's hunting at Harker Crag,"—the fact being that Sir Moses had had enough of Billy's company and had invited himself there to get rid of him.

The noiseless Mr. Bankhead then opened the door with a bow, and they proceeded to a *tête-à-tête* dinner, Cuddy Flintoff having wisely sent for his things from Heslop's house, and taken his departure to town under pretence, as he told Sir Moses in a note, of seeing Tommy White's horses sold.

Cuddy was one of that numerous breed of whom every sportsman knows at least one—namely, a man who is always wanting a horse, a "do you know of a horse that will suit me?" sort of a man. Charley Flight, who always walks the street like a lamplighter and doesn't like to be checked in his stride, whenever he sees Cuddy crawling along Piccadilly towards the Corner, puts on extra steam, exclaiming as he nears him, "How are you, Cuddy, how are you? I *don't* know of a horse that will suit you!" So he gets past without a pull-up.

But we are keeping the soup waiting—also the fish—cod sounds rather—for Mrs. Margerum not calculating on more than the usual three days of country hospitality,—the rest day, the drest day, and the pressed day,—had run out of fresh fish. Indeed the whole repast bespoke the exhausted larder peculiar to the end of the week, and an adept in dishes might have detected some old friends with new faces. Some *réchauffers* however are quite as good, if not better, than the original dishes—hashed venison for instance—though in this case, when Sir Moses inquired for the remains of the Sunday's haunch, he was told that Monsieur had had it for his lunch—Jack being a safe bird to lay it upon, seeing that he had not returned from the

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race. If Jack had been in the way then, the cat would most likely have been the culprit, or old Libertine, who had the run of the house.

Neither the Baronet nor Billy however was in any great humour for eating, each having cares of magnitude to oppress his thoughts, and it was not until Sir Moses had imbibed the best part of a pint of champagne besides sherry at intervals, that he seemed at all like himself. So he picked and nibbled and dom'd and dirtied as many plates as he could. Dinner being at length over, he ordered a bottle of the green-sealed claret (his best), and drawing his chair to the fire proceeded to crack walnuts and pelt the shells at particular coals in the fire with a vehemence that showed the occupation of his mind. An observing eye could almost tell which were levelled at Henerey Brown, which at Cuddy Flintoff, and which again at the impudent owner of Tippy Tom.

At length, having exhausted his spleen, he made a desperate dash at the claret-jug, and pouring himself out a bumper, pushed it across to our friend, with a "help yourself," as he sent it. The ticket-of-leave butler, who understood wine, had not lost his skill during his long residence at Portsmouth, and brought this in with the bouquet in great perfection. The wine was just as it should be, neither too warm nor too cold; and as Sir Moses quaffed a second glass, his equanimity began to revive.

When not thinking about money, his thoughts generally took a sporting turn,

Horses and hounds, and the system of kennel,
Leicestershire nags, and the hounds of old Meynell,

as the song says; and the loss of Billy's horse now obtruded on his mind.

"He was so sorry about that poor horse,—he couldn't help thinking about it,—dom'd if he could;" and as he said it, he took another bumper of claret, as if to console himself.

"How the deuce it had happened he couldn't imagine; his man, Wetun,—and there was no better judge—said he seemed

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perfectly well, and a better stable couldn't be than the one he was in ; indeed he was standing alongside of his own favourite mare, Whimpering Kate,—'faith, he wished he had told them to take her out, in case it was anything infectious,—only it looked more like internal disease than anything else.—Wished he mightn't be rotten. The Major was an excellent man,—cute,—” and here he checked himself, recollecting that Billy was going back there on the morrow. “A young man,” continued he, “should be careful who he dealt with, for many what were called highly honourable men were very unscrupulous about horses ;” and a sudden thought struck Sir Moses, which, with the aid of another bottle, he thought he might try to carry out. So apportioning the remains of the jug equitably between Billy and himself, he drew the bell, and desired the ticket-of-leave butler to bring in another bottle and a devilled biscuit.

“That wine won't hurt you,” continued he, addressing our friend, “that wine won't hurt you, it's not the nasty loaded stuff they manufacture for the English market, but pure, unadulterated juice of the grape, without a headache in a gallon of it ;” so saying, Sir Moses quaffed off his glass and set it down with evident satisfaction, feeling almost a match for the owner of Tippy Tom.’ He then moved his chair a little on one side, and resumed his contemplation of the fire,—the blue lights rising among the red,—the gas escaping from the coal,—the clear flame flickering with the draught. He thought he saw his way,—yes, he thought he saw his way, and forthwith prevented any one pirating his ideas, by stirring the fire. Mr. Bankhead then entered with the bottle and the biscuit, and, placing them on the table, withdrew.

“Come, Pringle !” cried Sir Moses cheerfully, seizing the massive cut-glass decanter, “let's drink the healths of the young ladies at —, you know where,” looking knowingly at our friend, who blushed. “We'll have a bumper to that,” continued he, pouring himself out one, and passing the bottle to Billy.

“The young ladies at Yammerton Grange !” continued Sir

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Moses, holding the glass to the now sparkling fire before he transferred its bright ruby-coloured contents to his thick lips. He then quaffed it off with a smack.

"The young ladies at Yammerton Grange!" faltered Billy, after filling himself a bumper.

"Nice girls those, dom'd if they're not," observed the Baronet, now breaking the devilled biscuit. "You must take care what you're about there, though, for the old lady doesn't stand any nonsense; the Major neither."

Billy said he wasn't going to try any on——.

"No—but they'll try it on with you," retorted Sir Moses: "mark my words if they don't."

"O, but I'm only there for hunting," observed Billy, timidly.

"I daresay," replied Sir Moses, with a jerk of his head, "I daresay,—but it's very agreeable to talk to a pretty girl when you come in, and those *are* devilish pretty girls, let me tell you,—dom'd if they're not,—only one talk leads to another talk, and ultimately Mamma talks about a small gold ring."

Billy was frightened, for he felt the truth of what Sir Moses said. They then sat for some minutes in silence, ruminating on their own affairs,—Billy thinking he would be careful of the girls, and wondering how he could escape Sir Moses's offer of a bump on the morrow,—Sir Moses thinking he would advance that performance a step. He now led the way.

"You'll be wanting a horse to go with the Major's harriers," observed he; "and I've got the very animal for that sort of work; that grey horse of mine, the Lord Mayor, in the five-stalled stable on the right; the safest, steadiest animal ever man got on to; and I'll make you a present of him, dom'd if I won't; for I'm more hurt at the loss of yours than words can express; wouldn't have had such a thing happen at my house on any account; so that's a bargain, and will make all square; for the grey's an undeniable good 'un—worth half-a-dozen of the Major's—and will do you some credit, for a young man on his preferment should always study appearances, and ride handsome horses; and the grey is one of the handsomest I ever saw. Lord Tootleton, up in Neck-and-crop-shire, who I got him of,

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gave three 'underd for him at the hammer, solely, I believe, on account of his looks, for he had never seen him out except in the ring, which is all my eye, for telling you whether a horse is a hunter or not; but, however, he *is* a hunter, and no mistake, and you are most heartily welcome to him, dom'd if you're not; and I'm deuced glad that it occurred to me to give him you, for I shall now sleep quite comfortable; so help yourself, and we'll drink Fox-hunting," saying which, Sir Moses, who had had about enough wine, filled on a liberal heel-tap, and again passed the bottle to his guest.

Now Billy, who had conned over the matter in his bedroom before dinner, had come to the conclusion that he had had about hunting enough, and that the loss of Napoleon the Great afforded a favourable opportunity for retiring from the chase; indeed, he had got rid of the overpowering Mr. Gaiters on that plea, and he was not disposed to be cajoled into a continuance of the penance by the gift of a horse; so as soon as he could get a word in sideways, he began hammering away at an excuse, thanking Sir Moses most energetically for his liberality, but expresssing his inability to accept such a magnificent offer.

Sir Moses, however, who did not believe in any one refusing a gift, adhered pertinaciously to his promise,—“Oh, indeed, he should have him, he wouldn't be easy if he didn't take him,” and ringing the bell he desired the footman to tell Wetun to see if Mr. Pringle's saddle would fit the Lord Mayor, and if it didn't, to let our friend have one of his in the morning, and “here!” added he, as the man was retiring, “bring in tea.”—And Sir Moses being peremptory in his presents, Billy was compelled to remain under pressure of the horse.—So after a copious libation of tea the couple hugged and separated for the night, Sir Moses exclaiming “Breakfast at nine, mind!” as Billy sauntered upstairs, while the Baronet ran off to his study to calculate what Henerey Brown & Co. had done him out of.

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CHAPTER LXXI.

MONSIEUR ROUGIER'S MYSTERIOUS LODGINGS.



R. GALLON'S liberality after the race with Mr. Flintoff was so great that Monsieur Rougier was quite overcome with his kindness and had to be put to bed at the last public-house they stopped at, viz.—the sign of the Nightingale on the Ashworth road. Independently of the brandy not being particularly good, Jack took so much of it that he slept the clock round, and it was past nine the next morning ere he awoke. It then took him good twenty minutes to make out where he was; he first of all thought he was at Boulogne, then in Paris, next at the Lord Warden Hotel at Dover, and lastly at the Coal-hole in the Strand.

Presently the recollection of the race began to dawn upon him—the red jacket—the grey horse, Cuddy in distress, and gradually he recalled the general outline of the performance, but he could not fill it up so as to make a connected whole, or to say where he was.

He then looked at his watch, and finding it was half-past four, he concluded it had stopped,—an opinion that was confirmed on holding it to his ear; so without more ado, he bounded out of bed in a way that nearly sent him through the gaping boards of the dry-rotting floor of the little attic in which they had laid him. He then made his way to the roof-raised window to see what was outside. A fine wet muddy road shone below him, along which a straw-cart was rolling; beyond the road was a pasture, then a turnip field; after which came a

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succession of green, brown, and drab fields, alternating and undulating away to the horizon, varied with here and there a belt or tuft of wood. Jack was no wiser than he was, but hearing sounds below, he made for the door, and opening the little flimsy barrier stood listening like a terrier with its ear at a rat-hole. These were female voices, and he thus addressed them—"I say, who's there? Theodosia, my dear," continued he, speaking down stairs, "vot's de time o' day, my sweet?"

The lady thus addressed as Theodosia was Mrs. Windybank, a very forbidding tiger-faced looking woman, desperately pitted with the small-pox, who was not in the best of humours in consequence of the cat having got to the cream-bowl; so all the answer she made to Jack's polite enquiry was, "Most ten."

"Most ten!" repeated Jack, "most ten! how the doose can that be?"

"It is, hooiver," replied she, adding, "you may look if you like."

"No, my dear, I'll take your word for it," replied Jack; "but tell me, Susannah," continued he, "whose house is this I'm at?"

"Whose house is't?" replied the voice; "whose house is't? why, Jonathan Windybank's—you knar that as well as I do."

"De lady's not pleasant," muttered Jack to himself; so returning into the room, he began to array himself in his yesterday's garments, Mr. Gallon's boots and leathers, his own coat with Findlater's cap, in which he presently came creaking downstairs and confronted the beauty with whom he had had the flying colloquy. The interview not being at all to her advantage, and as she totally denied all knowledge of Pangburn Park, and "de great Baronet vot kept the spotted dogs," Monsieur set off on foot to seek it; and after divers askings, mistakings, and deviations, he at length arrived on Rossington hill just as the servants' hall dinner-bell was ringing, the walk being much to the detriment of Mr. Gallon's boots.

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CHAPTER LXXII.

THE GIFT HORSE.



N consequence of Monsieur's *laches*, as the lawyers would say, Mr. Pringle was thrown on the resources of the house the next morning; but Sir Moses being determined to carry out his intention with regard to the horse, sent the footman to remind Billy that he was going to hunt, and to get him his things if required. So our friend was obliged to adorn for the chase instead of retiring from further exertion in that line as he intended; and with the aid of the footman he made a very satisfactory toilette,—his smart scarlet, a buff vest, a green cravat, correct shirt collar, with unimpeachable leathers and boots.

Though this was the make-believe day of the week, Sir Moses was all hurry and bustle as usual, and greeted our hero as he came downstairs with the greatest enthusiasm, promising, of all things in the world! to show him a run.

“Now bring breakfast! bring breakfast!” continued he, as if they had got twenty miles to go to cover; and in came urn, and eggs, and ham, and cakes, and tongue, and toast, and buns, all the concomitants of the meal.—At it Sir Moses went as if he had only ten minutes to eat it in, inviting his guest to fall-to also.

Just as they were in the midst of the meal a horse was heard to snort outside, and on looking up the great Lord Mayor was seen passing up the Park.

“Ah, there’s your horse!” exclaimed Sir Moses, “there’s your horse! been down to the shop to get his shoes looked to,”

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though in reality Sir Moses had told the groom to do just what he was doing, viz.—to pass him before the house at breakfast-time without his clothing.

The Lord Mayor was indeed a sort of horse that a youngster might well be taken in with, grey, with a beautiful head and neck, and an elegantly set-on tail. He stepped out freely and gaily, and looked as lively as a lark.

He was, however, as great an impostor as Napoleon the Great; for, independently of being troubled with the Megrimis, he was a shocking bad hack, and a very few fields shut him up as a hunter.

“Well now,” said Sir Moses, pausing in his meal, with the uplifted knife and fork of admiration, “that, to my mind, is the handsomest horse in the country,—I don’t care where the next handsomest is.—Just look at his figure, just look at his action.—Did you ever see any thing so elegant? To my mind he’s as near perfection as possible, and what’s more, he’s as good as he looks, and all I’ve got to say is, that you are most heartily welcome to him.”

“O, thank’e,” replied Billy, “thank’e, but I couldn’t think of accepting him,—I couldn’t think of accepting him indeed.”

“O, but you shall,” said Sir Moses, resuming his eating, “O, but you shall, so there’s an end of the matter.—And now have some more tea,” whereupon he proceeded to charge Billy’s cup in the awkward sort of way men generally do when they meddle with the teapot.

Sir Moses, having now devoured his own meal, ran off to his study, telling Billy he would call him when it was time to go, and our friend proceeded to daudle and saunter, and think what he would do with his gift horse. He was certainly a handsome one—handsomer than Napoleon, and grey was a smarter colour than bay—might not be quite so convenient for riding across country on, seeing that the colour was conspicuous, but for a hot day in the Park nothing could be more cool or delightful. And he thought it was extremely handsome of Sir Moses giving it to him, more, he felt, than nine-tenths of the people in the world would have done.



The Last Hours

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CHAPTER LXXIII.

SECOND THOUGHTS ARE BEST.



UR friend's reverie was presently interrupted by Sir Moses darting back, pen and paper in hand, exclaiming, “I'll tell ye what, my dear Pringle ! I'll tell ye what ! there shall be no obligation, and you shall give me fifty puns for the grey and pay for him when you please.

But *mark* me ! ” added he, holding up his fore-finger and looking most scrutinisingly at our friend, “*Only on one condition, mind ! only on one condition, mind !* that you give me the refusal of him if ever you want to part with him ; ” and without waiting for an answer, he placed the paper before our friend, and handing him the pen, said, “There, then, sign that I. O. U.” And Billy having signed it, Sir Moses snatched it up and disappeared, leaving our friend to a renewal of his cogitations.

Sir Moses having accomplished the grand “do,” next thought he would back out of the loan of the dog-cart. For this purpose he again came hurrying back, pen in hand, exclaiming, “Oh dear, he was so sorry, but it had just occurred to him that he wanted the mare to go to Lord Lundyfoote's; however, I'll make it all square,” continued he; “I'll tell Jenkins, the postman, to send a fly as soon as he gets to Hinton, which, I make no doubt, will be here by the time we come in from hunting, and it will take you and your traps all snug and comfortable; for a dog-cart, after all, is but a chilly concern at this time of year, and I shouldn't like you to catch cold going from my house ; ” and without waiting for an answer, he pulled-to the door and hurried back to his den. Billy shook

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his head, for he didn't like being put off that way, and muttered to himself, "I wonder who'll pay for it, though." However, on reflection, he thought perhaps he would be as comfortable in a fly as finding his way across country on horse-back; and as he had now ascertained that Monsieur could ride, whether or not he could drive, he settled that he might just as well take the grey to Yammerton Grange as not. This then threw him back on his position with regard to the horse, which was not so favourable as it at first appeared; indeed, he questioned whether he had done wisely in signing the paper, his Mamma having always cautioned him to be careful how he put his name to anything. Still, he felt he couldn't have got off without offending Sir Moses; and after all, it was more like a loan than a sale, seeing that he had not paid for him, and Sir Moses would take him back if he liked. Altogether he thought he might be worse off; and, considering that Lord Tootleton had given three hundred for the horse, he certainly must be worth fifty. There is nothing so deceiving as price. Only tell a youngster that a horse has cost a large sum, and he immediately looks at him, while he would pass him by if he stood at a low figure. Having belonged to a lord, too, made him so much more acceptable to Billy.

A loud crack of a whip, accompanied by a "Now, Pringle!" presently resounded through the house, and our friend again found himself called upon to engage in an act of horsemanship.

"Coming!" cried he, starting from the little mirror above the scanty grey marble mantel-piece, in which he was contemplating his moustachios; "Coming!" and away he strode, with the desperate energy of a man bent on braving the worst. His cap, whip, gloves, and mits, were all laid ready for him on the entrance-hall table; and seizing them in a cluster, he proceeded to decorate himself as he followed Sir Moses along the intricate passages leading to the stable-yard.

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CHAPTER LXXIV.

THE SHAM DAY.



ATURDAY is a very different day in the country to what it is in London. In London it is the lazy day of the week, whereas it is the busy one in the country. It is marked in London by the coming of the clean-linen carts, and the hurrying about of Hansoms with gentlemen with umbrellas and small carpet-bags, going to the steamers and stations for pleasure; whereas in the country everybody is off to the parliament of his local capital on business. All the markets in Hit-im and Hold-im shire were held on a Saturday, and several in Featherbed-fordshire; and as everybody who has nothing to do is always extremely busy, great gatherings were the result. This circumstance made Sir Moses hit upon Saturday for his fourth, or make-believe, day with the hounds, inasmuch as few people would be likely to come, and if they did, he knew how to get rid of them. The consequence was, that the court-yard at Pangburn Park exhibited a very different appearance, on this occasion, to what it would have done had the hounds met there on any other day of the week. Two red coats only, and those very shabby ones, with very shady horses under them—viz., young Mr. Lillikins of Red Hill Lodge, and his cousin Captain Luff of the navy (the latter out for the first time in his life), were all that greeted our sportsmen; the rest of the field being attired in shooting-jackets, tweeds, antigropolos, and other anti-fox-hunting looking things.

"Good morning, gentlemen! good morning!" cried Sir

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Moses, waving his hand from the steps at the promiscuous throng; and without condescending to particularise anyone, he hurried across for his horse, followed by our friend. Sir Moses was going to ride old Jack, one of the horses he had spoken of for Billy, a venerable brown, of whose age no one's memory about the place supplied any information—though when he first came all the then wiseacres prophesied a speedy decline. Still Old Jack had gone on from season to season, never apparently getting older, and now looking as likely to go on as ever. The old fellow having come pottering out of the stable and couched to his load, the great Lord Mayor came darting forward as if anxious for the fray. “It's *your* saddle, sir,” said Wetun, touching his forehead with his finger, as he held on by the stirrup for Billy to mount. Up then went our friend into the old seat of suffering. “There!” exclaimed Sir Moses, as he got his feet settled in the stirrups; “there, you do look well! If Miss ‘um’ sees you,” continued he, with a knowing wink, “it'll be all over with you;” so saying, Sir Moses touched Old Jack gently with the spur, and proceeded to the slope of the park, where Findlater and the whips now had the hounds.

Tom Findlater, as we said before, was an excellent huntsman, but he had his peculiarities, and in addition to that of getting drunk, he sometimes required to be managed by the rule of contrary, and made to believe that Sir Moses wanted him to do the very reverse of what he really did. Having been refused leave to go to Cleaver the butcher's christening-supper at the sign of the Shoulder of Mutton, at Kimberley, Sir Moses anticipated that this would be one of his perverse days, and so he began to take measures accordingly.

“Good morning, Tom,” said he, as huntsman and whips now sky-scraped to his advance—“morning, all of you,” added he, waving a general salute to the hound-encircling group.

“Now, Tom,” said he, pulling up and fumbling at his horn, “I've been telling Mr. Pringle that we'll get him a gallop so as to enable him to arrive at Yammerton Grange before dark.”

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"Yes, Sir Moses," replied Tom, with a rap of his cap-peak, thinking he would take very good care that he didn't.

"Now whether will Briarey Banks or the Reddish Warren be the likeliest place for a find?"

"Neither, Sir Moses, neither," replied Tom confidently, "Tipthorne's the place for us."

This was just what Sir Moses wanted.

"Tipthorne, you think, do you?" replied he, musingly. Tipthorne, you think—well, and where next?"

"Shillington, Sir Moses, and Halstead Hill, and so on to Hatchington Wood."

"Good!" replied the Baronet, "Good!" adding, "then let's be going."

At a whistle and a wave of his hand the watchful hounds darted up, and Tom taking the lead, the mixed cavalcade swept after them over the now yellow-grassed park in a north-easterly direction, Captain Luff working his screw as if he were bent on treading on the hounds' sterns.

There being no one out to whom Sir Moses felt there would be any profitable investment of attention, he devoted himself to our hero, complimenting him on his appearance, and on the gallant bearing of his steed, declaring that of all the neat horses he had ever set eyes on the Lord Mayor was out-and-out the neatest. So with compliments to Billy, and muttered "cusses" at Luff, they trotted down Oxclose Lane, through the little village of Homerton, past Dewfield Lawn, over Waybridge Common, shirking Upwood toll-bar, and down Cornforth Bank to Burford, when Tipthorne stood before them. It was a round Billesdon Coplow-like hill, covered with stunted oaks, and a nice warm lying gorse sloping away to the south; but Mr. Tadpole's keeper having the rabbits, he was seldom out of it, and it was of little use looking there for a fox.

That being the case, of course it was more necessary to make a great pretension, so halting noiselessly behind the high red-berried hedge, dividing the pasture from the gorse, Tom despatched his whips to their points, and then touching his cap

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to Sir Moses, said, "P'raps Mr. Pringle would like to ride in and see him find."

"Ah, to be sure," replied Sir Moses, "let's both go in," whereupon Tom opened the bridle-gate, and away went the hounds with a dash that as good as said if we don't get a fox we'll get a rabbit at all events.

"A fox for a guinea!" cried Findlater, cheering them, and looking at his watch as if he had him up already. "A fox for a guinea!" repeated he, thinking how nicely he was selling his master.

"Keep your eye on this side!" cried Sir Moses to Billy. "He'll cross directly!" Terrible announcement. How our friend did quake.

"*Yap, yap, yap,*" now went the shrill note of Tartar, the terrier. "*Yough, yough, yough,*" followed the deep tone of young Venturesome, close in pursuit of a bunny.

"*Crack!*" went a heavy whip, echoing through the air and resounding at the back of the hill.

All again was still, and Tom advanced up the cover, standing erect in his stirrups, looking as if half-inclined to believe it was a fox after all.

"*Eloo in! Eloo in!*" cried he, capping Talisman and Wonderful across. "*Yoicks wind 'im! yoicks push him up!*" continued he, thinking what a wonderful performance it would be if they did find.

"Squeak, yap, yell, squeak," now went the well-known sound of a hound in a trap. It is Labourer, and a whip goes diving into the sea of gorse to the rescue.

"Oh, dom those traps," cries Sir Moses, as the clamour ceases, adding, "no fox here, I told you so," adding, "should have gone to the Warren."

He then took out his box-wood horn and stopped the performance by a most discordant blast. The hounds came slinking out to the summons, some of them licking their lips as if they had not been there altogether for nothing.

"Where to, now, please, Sir Moses?" asked Tom, with a touch of his cap, as soon as he had got them all out.



"TALLY-HO!" CRIES CAPTAIN LUFF.

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"*Tally-ho!*!" cries Captain Luff, in a most stentorian strain—adding immediately, "Oh, no, I'm mistaken, *It's a hare!*!" as half the hounds break away to his cry.

"Oh, dom you and your noise," cries Sir Moses, in well-feigned disgust, adding—"Why don't you put your spectacles on?"

Luff looks foolish, for he doesn't know what to say, and the excitement dies out in a laugh at the Captain's expense.

"Where to, now, please, Sir Moses?" again asks Tom, chuckling at his master's displeasure, and thinking how much better it would have been if he had let him go to the supper.

"Where you please," growled the Baronet, scowling at Luff's nasty rusty Napoleons—"Where you please, you said Shillington, didn't you?—anywhere, only let us find a fox," added he, as if he really wanted one.

Tom then got his horse short by the head, and shouldering his whip, trotted off briskly, as if bent on retrieving the day. So he went through the little hamlet of Hawkesworth over Dippingham water meadows, bringing Blobbington mill-race into the line, much to Billy's discomfiture, and then along the Hinton and London turnpike to the sign of the Plough at the blacksmith's shop at Shillington.

The gorse was within a stone's throw of the "Public," so Luff and some of the thirsty ones pulled up to wet their whistles and light the clay pipes of gentility.

The gorse was very open, and the hounds ran through it almost before the sots had settled what they would have, and there being a bye-road at the far end, leading by a slight *détour* to Halstead Hill, Sir Moses hurried them out, thinking to shake off some of the tail by a trot. They therefore slipped away with scarcely a crack of a whip, let alone the twang of a horn.

"Bad work this," said Sir Moses, spurring and reining up alongside of Billy, "bad work this; that huntsman of mine," added he, in an undertone, "is the most obstinate fool under the sun; and let me give you a bit of advice," continued he, laying hold of our friend's arm, as if to enforce it. "If ever you keep

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hounds, always give orders and never ask opinions. Now, Mister Findlater!" hallooed he, to the bobbing cap in advance, "Now, Mister Findlater! you're well called Findlater, by Jove, for I think you'll never find at all. Halstead Hill, I suppose, next?"

"Yes, Sir Moses," replied Tom, with a half-touch of his cap, putting on a little faster, to get away, as he thought, from the spray of his master's wrath. And so with this comfortable game at cross purposes, master and servant passed over what is still called Lingfield Common (though it now grows turnips instead of gorse), and leaving Cherry-trees Windmill to the left, sunk the hill at Drovers' Heath, and crossing the bridge at the Wellingburn, the undulating form of Halstead Hill stood full before them. Tom then pulled up into a walk, and contemplated the rugged intricacies of its craggy bush-dotted face.

"If there's a fox in the country one would think he'd be here," observed he, in a general sort of way, well knowing that Mr. Testyfield's keeper took better care of them than that. "Gently hurrying!" hallooed he, now cracking his whip as the hounds pricked their ears and seemed inclined to break away to an outburst of children from the village school below.

Tom then took the hounds to the east end of the hill, where the lying began, and drew them along the face of it with the usual result, "*Nil*." Not even a rabbit.

"Well, that's queer," said he, with well feigned chagrin, as Pillager, Petulant, and Ravager appeared on the bare ground to the west, leading out the rest of the pack on their lines. They were all presently clustering in view again. A slight twang of the horn brought them pouring down to the hill to our obstinate huntsman just as Captain Luff and Co. hove in sight on the Wellingburn Bridge, riding as boldly as refreshed gentlemen generally do.

There was nothing for it then but Hatchington Wood, with its deep holding rides, and interminable extent.

There is a Hatchington wood in every hunt, wild inhospitable looking thickets, that seem as if they never knew an

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owner's care, where men light their cigars and gather in groups, well knowing that whatever sport the hounds may have, theirs is over for the day. Places in which a man may gallop his horse's tail off, and not hear or see half as much as those do who sit still.

Into it Tom now cheered his hounds, again thinking how much better it would have been if Sir Moses had let him go to the supper. "*Cover hoick! cover hoick!*" cheered he to his hounds, as they came to the rickety old gate. "I wouldn't ha' got drunk," added he to himself. "*Yoi, wind him! Yoi, rouse him, my boys!* What 'arm could it do him, my going, I wonders?" continued he to himself. "Yoi, try for him, Desp'rate, good lass! Desp'rate bad job my not gettin', I know," added he, rubbing his nose on the back of his hand; and so with cheers to his hounds and commentaries on Sir Moses's mean conduct, the huntsman proceeded from ride to road and from road to ride, varied with occasional dives into the fern and the rough, to exhort and encourage his hounds to rout out a fox; not that he cared much now whether he found one or not, for the cover had long existed on the reputation of a run that took place twelve years before, and it was not likely that a place so circumstanced would depart from its usual course on that day.

There is nothing certain, however, about a fox-hunt, but uncertainty; the worst-favoured days sometimes proving the best, and the best-favoured days sometimes proving the worst. We dare say, if our sporting readers would ransack their memories, they will find that most of their best days have been on unpromising ones. So it was on the present occasion, only no one saw the run but Tom and the first whip. Coming suddenly upon a fine travelling fox, at the far corner of the cover, they slipped away with him down wind, and had a bonâ fide five-and-thirty minutes, with a kill, in Lord Ladythorne's country, within two fields of his famous gorse cover, at Cockmire.

"Ord! rot ye, but ye should ha' seen that, if you'd let me go to the supper," cried Tom, as he threw himself off his

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lathered tail-quivering horse to pick up his fox, adding, “I knows when to blow the horn and when not.”

Meanwhile Sir Moses, having got into a wrangle with Jacky Phillips about the price of a pig, sate on his accustomed place on the rising ground by the old tumble-down farm-buildings, wrangling, and haggling, and declaring it was a “do.” In the midst of his vehemence, Robin Snowball’s camp of roystering, tinkering besom-makers came chattering past; and Robin, having a contract with Sir Moses for dog horses, gave his ass a forwarding bang, and ran up to inform his patron that “the hunds had gone away through Piercefield plantins iver see lang since :”—a fact that Robin was well aware of, having been stealing besom-shanks in them at the time.

“Oh, the devil!” shrieked Sir Moses, as if he was shot. “Oh, the devil!” continued he, wringing his hands, thinking how Tom would be bucketing Crusader now that he was out of sight ; and catching up his horse he stuck spurs in his sides, and went clattering up the stony cross-road to the west as hard as ever the old Jack could lay legs to the ground, thinking what a wigging he would give Tom if he caught him.

“Hark!” continued he, pulling short up across the road, and nearly shooting Billy into his pocket with the jerk of his suddenly stopped horse. “Hark!” repeated he, holding up his hand, “Isn’t that the horn ?”

“Oh, dom it ! it’s Parker, the postman,” added he,—“what business has the beggar to make such a row!” for, like all noisy people, Sir Moses had no idea of anybody making a noise but himself. He then set his horse a-going again, and was presently standing in his stirrups, tearing up the wretched, starvation, weed-grown ground outside the cover.

Having gained a sufficient elevation, he again pulled up, and turning short round, began surveying the country. All was quiet and tranquil. The cattle had their heads to the ground, the sheep were scattered freely over the fields, and the teams were going lazily over the clover lays, leaving shiny furrows behind them.

“Well, that’s a sell, at all events !” said he, dropping his

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reins. “Be b’und to say they are right into the heart of Featherbedfordshire by this time,—most likely at Upton Moss in Woodberry Vale,—as fine a country as ever man crossed,—and to think that that wretched, deluded man has it all to himself!—I’d draw and quarter him if I had him, dom’d if I wouldn’t,” added Sir Moses, cutting frantically at the air with his thong-gathered whip.

Our friend Billy, on the other hand, was all ease and composure. He had escaped the greatest punishment that could befall him, and was so clean and comfortable, that he resolved to surprise his fair friends at Yammerton Grange in his pink, instead of changing as he intended.

Sir Moses, having strained his eye-balls about the country in vain, at length dropped down in his saddle, and addressing the few darkly-clad horsemen around him with, “Well, gentlemen, I’m afraid it’s all over for the day,” adding, “Come, Pringle, let us be going,” he poked his way past them, and was presently retracing his steps through the wood, picking up a lost hound or two as he went. And still he was so loth to give it up, that he took Forester Hill in his way, to try if he could see anything of them; but it was all calm and blank as before; and at length he reached Pangburn Park in a very discontented mood.

In the court-yard stood the green fly that had to convey our friend back to fairy-land, away from the red coats, silk jackets, and the other persecutions of pleasure, to the peaceful repose of the Major and his “haryers.” Sir Moses looked at it with satisfaction, for he had had as much of our friend’s society as he required, and did not know that he could “do” him much more if he had him a month; so if he could now only get clear of Monsieur without paying him, that was all he required.

Jack, however, was on the alert, and appeared on the back-steps as Sir Moses dismounted; nor did his rapid dive into the stable avail him, for Jack headed him as he emerged at the other end, with a hoist of his hat, and a “Bon jour, Sare Moses, Baronet!”

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"Ah, Monsieur, comment vous portez-vous?" replied the Baronet, shying off with a keep-your-distance sort of wave of the hand.

Jack, however, was not to be put off that way, and following briskly up, he refreshed Sir Moses's memory with, "Pund, I beat Cuddy, old cock, to de clomp; ten franc—ten shillin'—I gets over de brook; thirty shillin' in all, Sare Moses, Baronet," —holding out his hand for the money.

"Oh, ah, true," replied Sir Moses, pretending to recollect the bets, adding, "If you can give me change of a fifty-pun note, I can pay ye," producing a nice clean one from his pocket-book that he always kept ready for cases of emergency like the present.

"Fifty-pun note, Sare Moses!" replied Jack, eyeing it. "Fifty-pun note! I 'ave not got such an astonishin' som about me at present," feeling his pockets as he spoke; "bot I vill seek change, if you please."

"Why, no," replied Sir Moses, thinking he had better not part with the decoy-duck. "I'll tell you what I'll do, though," continued he, restoring it to its case; "I'll send you a post-office order for the amount, or pay it to your friend Mr. Gallon, whichever you prefer."

"Vell, Sare Moses, Baronet," replied Jack, considering, "I think de leetle post-office order vill be de most digestible vay of squarin' matters."

"Va-a-ry good," cried Sir Moses; "Va-a-ry good, I'll send you one, then," and darting at a door in the wall, he slipped through it, and shot the bolt between Jack and himself.

And our hero, having recruited nature with lunch, and arranged with Jack for riding his horse, presently took leave of his most hospitable host, and entered the fly that was to convey him back to Yammerton Grange. And having cast himself into its ill-stuffed hold he rumbled and jolted across country in the careless, independent sort of way that a man does who has only a temporary interest in the vehicle, easy whether he was upset or not. Let us now anticipate his arrival by transferring our imaginations to Yammerton Grange.

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CHAPTER LXXV.

THE SURPRISE.



T is all very well for people to affect the magnificent, to give general invitations, and say “Come whenever it suits you; we shall always be happy to see you,” and so on; but somehow it is seldom safe to take them at their word. How many houses has the reader to which he can ride or drive up with the certainty of not putting people “out,” as the saying is. If there is a running account of company going on, it is all very well; another man more or less is neither here nor there; but if it should happen to be one of those solemn lulls that intervene between one set of guests going and another coming, denoted by the wide-apart napkins seen by a side glance as he passes the dining-room window, then it is not a safe speculation. At all events, a little notice is better, save, perhaps, among fox-hunters, who care less for appearances than other people.

It was Saturday, as we said before, and our friend the Major had finished his week’s work:—paid his labourers, handled the heifers that had left him so in the lurch, counted the sheep, given out the corn, ordered the carriage for church in case it kept dry, and as day closed had come into the house, and exchanged his thick shoes for old worsted-worked slippers, and cast himself into a semicircular chair in the druggetted drawing-room to wile away one of those long winter evenings that seem so impossible in the enduring length of a summer day, with that best of all papers, the “Hit-im and Hold-im shire Herald.” The local paper is the paper for the country

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gentleman, just as the “Times” is the paper for the Londoner. The “Times” may span the globe, tell what is doing at Delhi and New York, France, Utah, Prussia, Spain, Ireland, and the Mauritius; but the paper that tells the squire of the flocks and herds, the hills and dales, the births and disasters of his native district, is the paper for his money. So it was with our friend the Major. He enjoyed tearing the half-printed half-written envelope off his “Herald,” and holding its damp sides to the cheerful fire until he got it as crisp as a Bank of England note, and then, sousing down in his easy chair to enjoy its contents, conscious that no one had anticipated them. How he revelled in the advertisements, and accompanied each announcement with a mental commentary of his own.

We like to see country gentlemen enjoying their local papers.

Ashover Farm to let, conjured up recollections of young Mr. Gosling spouting past in white cords, and his own confident prediction that the thing wouldn’t last.

Burlinson, the auctioneer’s assignment, for the benefit of his creditors, reminded him of his dogs, and his gun, and his manor, and his airified looks, and drew forth anathemas on Burlinson in particular, and on pretenders in general.

Then Mr. Napier’s announcement that Mr. Draggleton, of Rushworth, had applied for a loan of four thousand pounds from the Lands Improvement Company for draining, sounded almost like a triumph of the Major’s own principles, Draggleton having long derided the idea of water getting into a two-inch pipe at a depth of four feet, or of draining doing any good.

And the Major chuckled with delight at the thought of seeing the long pent-up water flow in pure continuous streams off the saturated soil, and of the clear, wholesome complexion the land would presently assume. Then the editorial leader on the state of the declining corn markets, and of field operations (cribbed of course from the London papers) drew forth an inward opinion that the best thing for the landowners would be for corn to keep low and cattle to keep high for the next dozen years or more, and so get the farmers’ minds turned from the precarious

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culture of corn to the land improving practice of grazing and cattle-feeding.

And thus the Major sat, deeply immersed in the contents of each page; but as he gradually mastered the cream of their contents, he began to turn to and fro more rapidly; and as the rustling increased, Mrs. Yammerton, who was dying for a sight of the paper, at length ventured to ask if there was anything about the Hunt ball in it.

“Hunt ball!” growled the Major, who was then in the hay and straw market, wondering whether, out of the twenty-seven carts of hay reported to have been at Hinton Market on the previous Saturday, there were any of his tenants there on the sly; “Hunt ball!” repeated he, running the candle up and down the page; “No, there’s nothin’ about it here,” replied he, resuming his reading.

“It’ll be on the front page, my dear,” observed Mrs. Yammerston, “if there is anything.”

“Well, I’ll give it to you presently,” replied the Major, resuming his reading; and so he went on into the wool markets, thence to the potato and hide departments, until at length he found himself floundering among the Holloway Pills, Revalenta Food, and “Sincere act of gratitude,” &c., advertisements; when, turning the paper over with a whisk, and an inward “What do they put such stuff as that in for?” he handed it to his wife; while, John Bull like, he now stood up, airing himself comfortably before the fire.

No sooner was the paper fairly in Mamma’s hands, than there was a general rush of the young ladies to the spot, and four pair of eyes were eagerly glancing up and down the columns of the front page, all in search of the magical letter “B” for Ball. Education—Fall in Night Lights—Increased Rate of Interest—Money without Sureties—Iron and Brass Bedsteads—Glenfield Starch—Deafness Cured—German Yeast—Insolvent Debtor—Elkington’s Spoons—Boots and Shoes,—but, alas! no Ball.

“Yes, there it is! No it isn’t,” now cried Miss Laura, as her blue eye caught at the heading of Mrs. Bobbinette the

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milliner's advertisement, in the low corner of the page; Mrs. Bobbinette, like some of her customers, perhaps, not being a capital payer, and so getting a bad place. Thus it ran—

HIT-IM AND HOLD-IMSHIRE HUNT BALL.

MRS. BOBBINETTE

Begs to announce to the ladies her return from
Paris, with every novelty in

MILLINERY, MANTLES, EMBROIDERIES,
WREATHS, FANS, GLOVES, &c.

"Mrs. Bobbinette be hanged," growled the Major, who winced under the very name of milliner; "just as much goes to Paris as I do. Last time she was there I know she was never out of Hinton, for Paul Straddler watched her."

"Well, but she gets very pretty things at all events," replied Mrs. Yammerton, thinking she would pay her a visit.

"Aye, and a pretty bill she'll send in for them," replied the Major.

"Well, my dear, but you must pay for fashion, you know," rejoined Mamma.

"Pay for fashion! pay for haystacks!" growled the Major; "never saw such balloons as the women make of themselves. S'pose we shall have them as flat as doors next. One extreme always leads to another."

This discussion was here suddenly interrupted by a hurried "hush!" from Miss Clara, followed by a "hish!" from Miss Flora; and silence being immediately accorded, all ears recognised a rumbling sound outside the house that might have been mistaken for wind, had it not suddenly ceased before the door.

The whole party was paralysed; each drawing breath, reflecting on his or her peculiar position:—Mamma thinking of her drawing-room—Miss, of her hair—Flora, of her sleeves—Harriet, of her shabby shoes—the Major, of his dinner.

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The agony of suspense was speedily relieved by the grating of an iron step and a violent pull at the door-bell, producing ejaculations of, “It *is* however!” “Him, to a certainty!” with, “I told you so,—nothing but liver and bacon for dinner,” from the Major; while Mrs. Yammerton, more composed, swept three pair of his grey worsted stockings into the well of the ottoman, and covered the old hearth-rug with a fine new one from the corner, with a noble antlered stag in the centre. The young ladies hurried out of the room, each to make a quick revise of her costume.

The shock to the nervous sensibilities of the household was scarcely less severe than that experienced by the inmates of the parlour; and the driver of the fly was just going to give the bell a second pull, when our friend of the brown coat came, settling himself into his garment, wondering who could be coming at that most extraordinary hour.

“Major at home?” asked our hero, swinging himself out of the vehicle into the passage, and without waiting for an answer, he began divesting himself of his muffin-cap, cashmere shawl, and other wraps.

He was then ready for presentation. Open went the door. “Mr. Pringle!” announced the still astonished footman, and host and hostess advanced in the friendly emulation of cordiality. They were overjoyed to see him,—as pleased as if they had received a consignment of turtle and there was a haunch of venison roasting before the fire. The young ladies presently came dropping in one by one, each “so astonished to find Mr. Pringle there!” Clara thinking the ring was from Mr. Jinglington, the pianoforte-tuner; Flora, that it was Mr. Tightlace’s curate; while Harriet did not venture upon a white lie at all.

Salutations and expressions of surprise being at length over, the ladies presently turned the weather-conversation upon Pangburn Park, and inquired after the sport with Sir Moses, Billy being in the full glory of his pink and slightly soiled leathers and boots, from which they soon diverged to the Hunt ball, about which they could not have applied to any better authority than

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our friend. He knew all about it, and poured forth the volume of his information most freely.

Though the Major talked about there being nothing but liver and bacon for dinner, he knew very well that the very fact of there being liver and bacon bespoke that there was plenty of something else in the larder. In fact, he had killed a south-down,—not one of your modern muttoney-lambs, but an honest, home-fed, four-year-old, with its fine dark meat and rich gravy; in addition to which there had been some minor murders of ugly Cochin-China fowls,—to say nothing of a hunted hare, hanging by the heels, and several snipes and partridges, suspended by the neck. It is true, there was no fish, for, despite the railroad, Hit-im and Hold-im shire generally was still badly supplied with fish, but there was the useful substitute of cod-sounds, and some excellent mutton-broth; which latter is often better than half the soups one gets. Altogether, there was no cause for despondency; but the Major, having been outvoted on the question of requiring notice of our friend's return, of course, now felt bound to make the worst of the case—especially as the necessary arrangements would considerably retard his dinner, for which he was quite ready. He had, therefore, to smile at his guest, and snarl at his family, at one and the same time.—Delighted to see Mr. Pringle back.—Disgusted at his coming on a Saturday.—Hoped our hero was hungry.—Could answer for it, he was himself,—with a look at Madam, as much as to say, “Come, you go and see about things and don't stand simpering there.”

But Billy, who had eaten a pretty hearty lunch at Pangburn Park, had not got jolted back into an appetite by his transit through the country, and did not enter into the feelings of his half-famished host. A man who has had half his dinner in the shape of a lunch, is far more than a match for one who has fasted since breakfast, and our friend chatted first with one young lady, and then with another, with an occasional word at Mamma, delighted to get vent for his long pent-up flummery. He was indeed most agreeable.

Meanwhile the Major was in and out of the room, growling

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and getting into everybody's way, retarding progress by his anxiety to hurry things on.

At length it was announced that Mr. Pringle's room was ready; and forthwith the Major lit him a candle, and hurried him upstairs, where his uncorded boxes stood ready for the opening keys of ownership.

"Ah, there you are!" cried the Major, flourishing the composite candle about them, "there you are! needn't mind much dressing—only ourselves—only ourselves. There's the boot-jack,—here's some hot water,—and we'll have dinner as soon as ever you are ready." So saying, he placed the candle on the much be-muslined toilette-table, and, diving into his pocket for the key of the cellar, hurried off to make the final arrangement of a feast.

Our friend, however, who was always a dawdling, leisurely gentleman, took very little heed of his host's injunctions, and proceeded to unlock and open his boxes as if he was going to dress for a ball instead of a dinner; and the whole party being reassembled, many were the Major's speculations and enquiries "what could he be about?" "must have gone to bed," "would go up and see," ere the glad sound of his opening door announced that he might be expected. And before he descended a single step of the staircase the Major gave the bell such a pull as proclaimed most volubly the intensity of his feelings. The ladies of course were shocked, but a hungry man is bad to hold, and there is no saying but the long-pealing tongue of the bell saved an explosion of the Major's. At all events when our friend came sauntering into the now illuminated drawing-room, the Major greeted him with, "Heard you coming, rang the bell, knew you'd be hungry, long drive from Sir Moses's here;" to which Billy drawled a characteristic "Yarse," as he extinguished his candle and proceeded to ingratiate himself with the now elegantly attired ladies, looking more lovely from his recent restriction to the male sex.

The furious peal of the bell had answered its purpose, for he had scarcely got the beauties looked over, and settled in his own mind that it was difficult to say which was the prettiest,

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ere the door opened and the long-postponed dinner was announced to be on the table, and the Major, having blown out the composites, gladly followed the ladies to the scene of action.

And his host being too hungry to waste his time in apologies for the absence of this and that, and the footboy having plenty to do without giving the dishes superfluous airings, and the gooseberry champagne being both lively and cool, the dinner passed off as pleasantly as a luncheon, which is generally allowed to be the most agreeable, sociable meal of the day, simply because of the absence of all fuss and pretension. And by the time the Major had got to the cheese, he found his temper considerably improved. Indeed, so rapidly did his spirits rise, that before the cloth was withdrawn, he had well-nigh silenced all the ladies, with his marvellous haryers,—five-and-thirty years master of haryers without a subscription,—and as soon as he got the room cleared, he inflicted the whole hunt upon Billy that he had written to him about, an account of which he had in vain tried to get inserted in the Featherbedfordshire Gazette, through the medium of old Wotherspoon, who had copied it out and signed himself “A Delighted Stranger.” Dorsay Davis, however, knew his cramped handwriting, and put his manuscript into the fire, observing in his notice to correspondents that “A Delighted Stranger” had better send his currant-jelly contributions to grandmamma, meaning the Hit-im and Hold-im shire Herald.

So our friend was victimised into a *vivâ voce* account of this marvellous chase, beginning at Conksbury corner and the flight up to Foremark Hill, and down over the water meadows to Dovedale Green, &c., interspersed with digressions and explanations of the wonderful performance of the particular members of the pack, until he scarcely knew whether a real run or the recital of one was the most formidable. At length the Major, having talked himself into a state of excitement without making any apparent impression on his guest's obdurate understanding, proposed as a toast “The Merry Haryers,” and intimated that tea was ready in the drawing-room, thinking he never had

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so phlegmatic an auditor before. Very different, however, was his conduct amid the general conversation of the ladies, who thought him just as agreeable as the Major thought him the contrary. And they were all quite surprised when the clock struck eleven, and declared they thought it could only be ten, except the Major, who knew the odd hour had been lost in preparing the dinner. So he moved an adjournment, and proclaimed that they would breakfast at nine, which would enable them to get to church in good time. Whereupon mutual good-nights were exchanged, our friend was furnished with a flat candlestick, and the elder sisters retired to talk him over in their own room ; for however long ladies may be together during the day, there is always a great balance of conversation to dispose of at last, and so the two chatted and talked until midnight.

Next morning they all appeared in looped-up dresses, showing the parti-coloured petticoats of the prevailing fashion, which looked extremely pretty, and were all very well—a great improvement on the draggetails—until they came to get into the coach, when it was found that, large as the vehicle was, it was utterly inadequate for their accommodation. Indeed the door seemed ludicrously insufficient for the ingress, and Miss Clara turned round and round like a peacock contending with the wind, undecided which way to make the attempt. At last she chose a bold sideways dash, and entered with a squeeze of the petticoat, which suddenly expanded into its original size, but when the sisters had followed her example there was no room for the Major; nor would there have been any for our hero had not Mamma been satisfied with her own natural size, and so left space to squeeze him in between herself and the fair Clara. The Major then had to mount the coach-box beside old Solomon, and went growling and grumbling along at the extravagancies of fashion, and wondering what the deuce those petticoats would cost. He was presently comforted by seeing two similar ones circling over the road in advance, which on overtaking proved to contain the elegant Miss Bushels, daughters of his hind at Bonnyrigs farm,



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whereupon he made a mental resolution to reduce Bushel's wages a shilling a week at least.

This speedy influx of fashion and abundance of cheap tawdry finery has well nigh destroyed the primitive simplicity of country churches. The housemaid now dresses better—finer at all events—than her mistress did twenty years ago, and it is almost impossible to recognise working people when in their Sunday dresses. Gauze bonnets, Marabout feathers, lace scarfs, and silk gowns usurp the place of straw and cotton print, while lace-fringed kerchiefs are flourished by those whose parents scarcely knew what a pocket-handkerchief was. There is a medium in all things, but this mania for dress has got far beyond the bounds of either prudence or propriety; and we think the Major's recipe for reducing it by no means a bad one.

We need scarcely say that our hero's appearance at church caused no small sensation in a neighbourhood where the demand for gossip was far in excess of the supply. Indeed, we fear many fair ladies' eyes were oftener directed to Major Yammerton's pew than to the Reverend Mr. Tightlace in the pulpit. Wonderful were the stories and exaggerations that ensued, people always being on the running-up tack until a match is settled, after which, of course, they assume the running-down one, pitying one or other victim extremely—wouldn't be him or her for anything—Mr. Tightlace thought any of the young ladies might do better than marry a mere fox-hunter, though we are sorry to add that the fox-hunter was far more talked of than the sermon. The general opinion seemed to be that our hero had been away preparing that dread document, the proposals for a settlement; and there seemed to be very little doubt that there would be an announcement of some sort in a day or two—especially when our friend was seen to get into the carriage after the gay petticoats, and the little Major to remount the box-seat.

And when at the accustomed stable stroll our master of haryers found the gallant grey standing in the place of the bay, he was much astonished, and not a little shocked to learn the sad catastrophe that had befallen the bay.

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"Well, he never heard anything like that!—*dead!* What, do you mean to say he absolutely died on your hands without any apparent cause?" demanded the Major; "must have been poisoned, surely;" and he ran about telling everybody, and making as much to do as if the horse had still been his own. He then applied himself to finding out how Billy came by the grey, and was greatly surprised to learn that Sir Moses had given it him. "Well, that was queer," thought he, "wouldn't have accused him of that." And he thought of the gift of Little Bo-peep, and wondered whether this gift was of the same order.

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CHAPTER LXXVI.

MONEY AND MATRIMONY.



ONEY and matrimony! what a fine taking title! If that does not attract readers, we don't know what will. Money and matrimony! how different, yet how essentially combined, how intimately blended! "No money, no matrimony," might almost be written above some doors. Certainly money is an essential, but not so absorbing an essential as some people make it. Beyond the expenditure necessary for a certain establishment, a woman is seldom much the better for her husband's inordinate wealth. We have seen the wife of a reputed millionaire no better done by than that of a country squire.

Mr. Prospero Plutus may gild his coach and his harness, and his horses too, if he likes, but all the licker in the world will not advance him a step in society; therefore, what can he do with his surplus cash but carry it to the "reserve fund," as some Joint Stock Bankers pretend to do? Still there is a money worship among us, that is not even confined to the opposite sex, but breaks out in veneration among men, just as if one man having half a million or a million pieces of gold could be of any advantage to another man, who only knows the rich man to say "How d'ye do?" to. A clever foreigner, who came to this country some years ago for the honestly avowed purpose of marrying an heiress, used to exclaim, when any one told him that another man had so many thousands a year, "Vell, my good friend, vot for that to me? I cannot go for be marry to him!" and we never hear a man recommended

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to another man for his wealth alone, without thinking of our foreign friend. What earthly good can Plutus's money do us? We can safely say, we never knew a rich man who was not uncommonly well able to take care of his cash. It is your poor men who are easy about money. To tell a young lady that a young gentleman has so many thousands a year is very different; and this observation leads us to say, that people who think they do a young man a kindness by exaggerating his means or expectations, are greatly mistaken. On the contrary, they do him an injury; for, sooner or later, the lawyers know everything, and disappointment and vexation is the result.

Since our friend Warren wrote his admirable novel, "Ten Thousand a Year," that sum has become the fashionable income for exagerators. Nobody that has anything a year has less, though we all know how difficult a sum it is to realise, and how impossible it is to extract a five-pound note, or even a sovereign, from the pockets of people who talk of it as a mere bagatelle. This money mania has increased amazingly within the last few years, aided, no doubt, by the gigantic sums the Joint-Stock banks have enabled penniless people to "go" for.

When Wainwright, the first of the assurance office defrauders by poison, was in prison, he said to a person who called upon him, " You see with what respect they treat me. They don't set me to make my bed, or sweep the yard, like those fellows," pointing to his brother prisoners; "no, they treat me like a gentleman. They think I'm in for ten thousand pounds." Ten thousand pounds! What would ten thousand pounds be now-a-days, when men speculate to the extent of a quarter or may be half a million of money? Why Wainwright would have had to clean out the whole prison on the present scale of money delinquency. A hundred thousand pounder is quite a common fellow, hardly worth speaking of. There was a time when the greediest man was contented with his plum. Now the cry is, " More! more!" until some fine morning the crier is "no more" himself.

This money craving and boasting is all bad. It deceives young men, and drives those of moderate income into the

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London clubs, instead of their marrying and settling quietly as their fathers did before them. They hear of nothing but thousands and tens of thousands until they almost believe in the reality, and are ashamed to encounter the confessional stool of the lawyers, albeit they may have as much as with prudence and management would make married life comfortable. Boasting and exaggeration also greatly misleads and disappoints anxious "Mamas," all ready to believe whatever they like, causing very likely promising speculations to be abandoned in favour of what turn out great deal worse ventures.

Only let a young man be disengaged, professionally and bodily, and some one or other will be sure to invest him with a fortune, or with surprising expectations from an uncle, an aunt, or other near relation. It is surprising how fond people are of fanning the flame of a match, and how they will talk about what they really know nothing, until an unfortunate youth almost appears to participate in their exaggerations. Could some of these Leviathans of fortune know the fabulous £ s. d. colours under which they have sailed, they would be wonderfully astonished at the extent of their innocent imposture. Yet they were not to blame because people said they had ten thousand a year, were richest commoners in fact. Many would then understand much unexplained politeness, and appreciate its disinterestedness at its true value. Captain Quaver would see why Mrs. Sunnybrow was so anxious that he should hear Matilda sing; Mr. Grist why Mrs. Snubwell manœuvred to get him next Bridget at dinner; and perhaps our "Richest Commoner" why Mrs. Yammerton was so glad to see him back at the Grange.

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CHAPTER LXXVII.

A NIGHT DRIVE.



PEOPLE who travel in the winter should remember it isn't summer, and time themselves accordingly. Sir Moses was so anxious to see Monsieur Rougier off the premises, in order to stop any extra hospitality, that he delayed starting for Lundyfoote Castle until he saw him fairly mounted on the gift grey and out of the stable-yard ; he then had the mare put to the dog-cart, and tried to make up for lost time by extra speed upon the road. But winter is an unfavourable season for expedition ; if highways are improving, turnpikes are getting neglected, save in the matter of drawing the officers' sinecure salaries, and, generally speaking, the nearer a turnpike is to a railway, the worse the turnpike is, as if to show the wonderful advantage of the former. So Sir Moses went flipping and flopping, and jipping and jerking, through Bedland and Hawks-worth and Washingley-field, but scarcely reached the confines of his country when he ought to have been nearing the Castle. It was nearly four o'clock by the great gilt-lettered clock on the diminutive church in the pretty village of Tidswell, situated on the banks of the sparkling Lune, when he pulled up at the sign of the " Hold-away Harriers " to get his mare watered and fed. It is at these sort of places that the traveller gets the full benefit of country slowness and stupidity. Instead of the quick hostler, stepping smartly up to his horse's head as he reins up, there is generally a hunt through the village for old Tom, or young Joe, or some worthy who is either too old or

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too idle to work. In this case it was old bow-legged, wiry Tom Brown, whose long experience of the road did not enable him to anticipate a person's wants; so after a good stare at the driver, whom at first he thought was Mr. Meggison, the exciseman; then Mr. Puncheon, the brewer; and lastly, Mr. Mossman, Lord Polkaton's ruler; he asked, with a bewildered scratch of his head, "What, de ye want her put oop?"

"Oop, yes," replied Sir Moses; "what d'ye think I'm stopping for? Look alive; that's a good fellow," added he, throwing him the reins, as he prepared to descend from the vehicle.

"O, it's you, Sir Moses, is it," rejoined the now enlightened patriarch, "I didn't know you without your red coat and cap;" so saying, he began to fumble at the harness, and, with the aid of the Baronet, presently had the mare out of the shafts. It then occurred to the old gentleman that he had forgotten the key of the stable. "A sink," said he, with a dash of his disengaged hand, "I've left the key i' the pocket o' mar coat, down i' Willy Wood's shop, when ar was helpin' to kill a pig—run, lad, doon, to Willy Wood," said he to a staring by-standing boy, "and get me mar coat;" adding to Sir Moses, as the lad slunk unwillingly away, "he'll be back directly wi' it." So saying, he proceeded to lead the mare round to the stable at the back of the house.

When the coat came, then there was no pail; and when they got a pail, then the pump had gone dry; and when they got some water from the well, then the corn had to be brought from the top of the house; so, what with one delay and another, day was about done before Sir Moses got the mare out of the stable again. Night comes rapidly on in the short winter months, and as Sir Moses looked at the old-fashioned road leading over the steepest part of the opposite hill, he wished he was well on the far side of it. He then examined his lamps, and found there were no candles in them, just as he remembered that he had never been to Lundyfoote Castle on wheels, the few expeditions he made there having been performed on horseback, by those nicks and cuts that fox-hunters

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are so famous at making and finding. "Ord dom it," said he to himself, "I shall be getting benighted. Tell me," continued he, addressing the old hostler, "do I go by Marshfield and Hengrove, or——"

"No, no, you've ne business at noughter Marshfield nor Hengrove," interrupted the sage; "yeer way is straight oop to Crowfield-hall and Roundhill-green, then to Brackley Moor and Belton, and so on into the Sandywell-road at Langley. But if ar were you," continued he, beginning to make confusion worse confounded, "ar would just gan through Squire Patterson's Park here," jerking his thumb to the left to indicate the direction in which it lay.

"Is it shorter?" demanded Sir Moses, re-ascending the vehicle.

"W-h-o-y no, it's not shorter," replied the man, "but it's a better road rayther—less agin collar-like. When ye get to the new lodge ye mun mind turn to the right, and keep Whitecliffe law to the left, and Lidney Mill to the right, you then pass Shunlow tilery, and make straight for Roundhill Green and Brackley Moor, and then on to Belton, as ar tell'd ye afoor—ye can't miss yeer way," added he, thinking he could go it in the dark himself.

"Can't I," replied Sir Moses, drawing the reins. He then chucked the man a shilling, and touching the mare with the point of the whip, trotted across the bridge over the Lune, and was speedily brought up at a toll-bar on the far side.

It seems to be one of the ordinances of country life, that the more toll a man pays the worse road he gets, and Sir Moses had scarcely parted with his sixpence ere the sound running turnpike which tempted him past Squire Patterson's lodge, ran out into a loose river-stoned track, that grew worse and worse the higher he ascended the hill. In vain he hissed, and jerked, and jagged at the mare. The wheels revolved as if they were going through sea-sand. She couldn't go any faster.

It is labour and sorrow travelling on wheels, with a light horse and a heavy load, on woolly winter roads, especially under the depressing influence of declining day—when a

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gorgeous sun-set has no charms. It is then that the value of the hissing, hill-rounding, plain-scudding railway is appreciated. The worst line that ever was constructed, even one with goods, passengers, and minerals all mixed in one train, is fifty times better than one of these ploughing, sobbing, heart-breaking drives. So thought Sir Moses, as, whip in hand, he alighted from the vehicle to ease the mare up the steep hill, which now ran parallel with Mr. Patterson's rather indifferent park wall.

What a commentary on consequence a drive across country affords. One sees life in all its phases—Cottage, House, Grange, “Imperial John” Hall, Park, Tower, Castle, &c. The wall, however, is the true index of the whole. Show me your wall and I'll tell you what you have. There is the five hundred —by courtesy, thousand—a-year wall, built of common stone, well embedded in mortar, extending only a few yards on either side of the lodgeless green gate. The thousand—by courtesy, fifteen hundred—a-year wall, made of the same material, only the mortar ceases at the first convenient bend of the road, and the mortared round coping of the top is afterwards all that holds it together. Then there is the aspiring block and course wall, leading away with a sweep from either side of a handsome gateway, but suddenly terminating in hedges. The still further continued wall, with an abrupt juncture in split oak paling, that looks as if it had been suddenly nipped by a want-of-cash frost. We then get to the more successful all-round-the-Park-alike efforts of four or five thousand a year; the still more solid masonry and ornamental work of “Ten thousand a-Year,” a Warren wall in fact, until at length we come to one so strong and so high, that none but a man on a laden wain can see over it, which of course denotes a Ducal residence, with fifty or a hundred thousand a-year. In like manner, a drive across country enables a man to pick up information without the trouble of asking for it.

The board against the tree at the corner of the larch plantation, stating that “Any one trespassing on these grounds, the property of A. B. C. Sowerby, Esq., will, &c., with the utmost, &c.,” enables one to jump to the conclusion that

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the Westmoreland-slated roof we see peering among the eagle-winged cedars and luxuriant Scotch firs on the green slope to the left, is the residence of said Sowerby, who doesn't like to be trespassed upon. A quick-eyed land-agent would then trace the boundaries of the Sowerby estate from the rising ground, either by the size of its trees, its natural sterility, or by the rough, gateless fences, where it adjoins the neighbouring proprietors.

Again, the sign of the Smith Arms at a wayside public-house, denotes that some member of that illustrious family either lives or has property in that immediate neighbourhood, and as everybody has a friend Smith, we naturally set about thinking whether it is our friend Smith or not. So a nobleman's coronet surmounting his many-quartered coat-of-arms, suggests that the traveller is in the neighbourhood of magnificence; and if his appearance is at all in his favour, he will, perhaps, come in for a touch, or demi-touch, of the hat from the passers-by, the process being almost mechanical in aristocratic parts. A board at a branch road with the words "To Lavender Lodge only," saves one the trouble of asking the name of the place towards which we see the road bending, while a great deal of curious nomenclature may be gleaned from shop-fronts, inn-signs, and cart-shafts.

But we are leaving Sir Moses toiling up the hill alongside of his dog-cart, looking now at his watch, now at his jaded mare, now at Mr. Patterson's fragile park wall, thinking he would send it over with his shoulder if he came to it out hunting. The wall was at length abruptly terminated by a cross road intersecting the hill along a favourable fall of the ground, about the middle of it, and the mare and Sir Moses mutually stopped, the former to ease herself on the piece of level ground at the junction, the latter to consider whether his course was up the hill or along the more inviting line to the left.

"Marshfield," muttered he to himself, "is surely that way, but then that old buffer said I had no business at Marshfield. Dom the old man," continued he, "I wish I'd never asked him

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anything about it, for he has completely bewildered me, and I believe I could have found my way better without."

So saying, Sir Moses reconnoitred the scene; the balance of the fat hill in front, with the drab-coloured road going straight up the steepest part of it, the diverging lines either way; above all, the fast closing canopy around. Across the road, to the right, was a paintless, weather-beaten finger-post, and though our friend saw it had lost two of its arms, he yet thought the remaining ones might give him some information. Accordingly, he went over to consult it. Not a word, no, not a letter was legible. There were some upright marks, but what they had stood for it was impossible to decypher. Sir Moses was nonplussed. Just at this critical moment, a rumbling sound proceeded from below, and looking down the hill, a grey speck loomed in the distance, followed by a darker one a little behind. This was consoling; for those who know how soon an agricultural country becomes quiet after once the labourers go to their homes can appreciate the boon of any stirrers.

Still the carts came very slowly, and the quick falling shades of night travelled faster than they. Sir Moses stood listening anxiously to their jolting noises, thinking they would never come up. At the same time, he kept a sharp eye on the cross-road, to intercept any one passing that way. A tinker, a poacher, a mugger, the veriest scamp, would have been welcome, so long as he knew the country. No one, however, came along. It was an unfrequented line; and old Gilbert Price, who worked by the day, always retired from raking in the mud ruts on the approach of evening. So Sir Moses stood staring and listening, tapping his boot with his whip, as he watched the zig-zag course of the grey up the hill. He seemed a good puller, and to understand his work, for as yet no guiding voice had been heard. Perhaps the man was behind. As there is always a stout pull just before a resting-place, the grey now came to a pause, to collect his energies for the effort.

Sir Moses looked at his mare, and then at the carts halting below, wondering whether if he left her she would take off.

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Just as he determined to risk it, the grey applied himself vigorously to the collar, and with a grinding, ploughing rush, came up to where Sir Moses stood.

The cart was empty, but there was a sack-like thing, with a wide-awake hat on the top, rolling in the one behind.

“*Holloo, my man!*” shouted Sir Moses, with the voice of a Stentor.

The wide-awake merely nodded to the motion of the cart.

“*Holloo, I say!*” roared he, still louder.

An extended arm was thrown over the side of the cart, and the wide-awake again nodded as before.

“The beggar’s asleep!” muttered Sir Moses, taking the butt-end of his whip, and poking the somnambulist severely in the stomach.

A loud grunt, and with a strong smell of gin, as the monster changed his position, was all that answered the appeal.

“The brute’s drunk,” gasped Sir Moses, indignant at having wasted so much time in waiting for him.

The sober grey then made a well-rounded turn to the right, followed by the one in the rear, leaving our friend enveloped in many more shades of darkness than he was when he first descried him coming. Night had indeed about closed in, and lights began to appear in cottages and farm-houses that sparsely dotted the hill-side.

“Well, here’s a pretty go,” said Sir Moses, remounting the dog-cart, and gathering up the reins; “I’ll just give the mare her choice,” continued he, touching her with the whip, and letting her go. The sensible animal took the level road to the left, and Sir Moses’s liberality was at first rewarded by an attempted trot along it, which, however, soon relaxed into a walk. The creaking, labouring vehicle shook and rolled with the concussion of the ruts.

He had got upon a piece of township road, where each surveyor shuffled through his year of office as best he could, filling up the dangerous holes in summer with great boulder stones that turned up like flitches of bacon in winter. So Sir Moses rolled and rocked in imminent danger of an upset. To

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add to his misfortunes, he was by no means sure but that he might have to retrace his steps: it was all chance.

There are but two ways of circumventing a hill, either by going round it or over it; and the road, after evading it for some time, at length took a sudden turn to the right, and grappled fairly with its severity. The mare applied herself sedulously to her task, apparently cheered by the increasing lights on the hill. At length she neared them, and the radiant glow of a blacksmith's shop cheered the drooping spirit of the traveller.

"Holloo, my man!" cried Sir Moses, at length pulling up before it.

"Holloo!" responded the spark-showering Vulcan from within.

"Is this the way to Lord Lundyfoote's?" demanded Sir Moses, knowing the weight a nobleman's name carries in the country.

"Lord Lundyfoote's!" exclaimed Osmand Hall, pausing in his work; "Lord Lundyfoote's!" repeated he; "why, where ha' you come from?"

"Tidswell," replied Sir Moses, cutting off the former part of the journey.

"Why, what set ye this way?" demanded the dark man, coming to the door with a red-hot horse-shoe on a spike, which was nearly all that distinguished him from the gloom of night; "ye should never ha' coom'd this way; ye should ha' gone by Marshfield and Hengrove."

"Dom it, I said so!" ejaculated the Baronet, nearly stamping the bottom of his gig out with vexation. "However, never mind," continued he, recollecting himself, "I'm here now, so tell me the best way to proceed."

This information being at length accorded, Sir Moses proceeded; and the rest of the hill being duly surmounted, the dancing and stationary lights spreading o'er the far-stretching vale now appeared before him, with a clustering constellation, amid many minor stars scattered around, denoting the whereabouts of the castle.

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It is always cheering to see the far end of a journey, distant though the haven be, and Sir Moses put on as fast as his lampless condition would allow him, trusting to his eyes and his ears for keeping on the road. Very much surprised would he have been had he retraced his steps the next morning, and seen the steep banks and yawning ditches he had suddenly saved himself from going over or into by catching at the reins on feeling either wheel running in the soft.

At length he reached the lodges of the massive variously-windowed castle, and passing gladly through them, found, on alighting at the door, that, instead of being late for dinner as he anticipated, his Lordship, who always ate a hearty lunch, was generally very easy about the matter, sometimes dining at seven, sometimes at eight, sometimes in summer even at nine o'clock. The footman, in reply to Sir Moses inquiring what time his Lordship dined, said he believed it was ordered at seven, but he didn't know when it would be on the table.

Being an ardent politician, Lord Lundyfoote received Sir Moses with the fellow-feeling that makes us wondrous kind cordiality, and dived so energetically into his subject, as soon as he got the weather disposed of, as never to wait for an answer to his question whether his guest would like to take anything before dinner, the consequence of which was, that our poor friend was nearly famished with waiting. In vain the library time-piece ticked, and chimed, and struck ; jabber, jabber, jabber, went his voluble lordship ; in vain the deep-toned castle-clock reverberated through the walls—on, on, he went, without noticing it, until the butler, in apparent despair, took the gong, and gave it such a beating just outside the door, that he could scarcely hear himself speak. Sir Moses then adroitly slipped in the question if that was the signal for dressing ; to which his Lordship having yielded a reluctant “Yes,” he took a candle from the entering footman, and pioneered the Baronet up to his bedroom, amid a running commentary on the state of the country and the stability of the ministry. And when he returned he found his Lordship

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distributing his opinions among an obsequious circle of neighbours, who received all he said with the deference due to a liberal dispenser of venison; so that Sir Moses not only got his dinner in comparative peace, but warded his Lordship off the greater part of the evening.

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CHAPTER LXXVIII.

MASTER ANTHONY THOM.



THE two-penny post used to be thought a great luxury in London, though somehow great people were often shy of availing themselves of its advantages, indeed of taking their two-penny-posters in. "Two-penny-posters" circulars, and ticketed shops, used to be held in about equal repugnance by some. The Dons never thought of sending their notes, or cards of invitation, by the two-penny post. John Thomas used always to be trotted out for the purpose of delivery. Pre-paying a letter either by the

two-penny post or the general used to be thought little short of an insult. Public opinion has undergone a great change in these matters. Not paying them is now the offence. We need scarcely expatiate on the boon of the penny post, nor on the advantage of the general diffusion of post-offices throughout the country, though we may observe, that the penny post was one of the few things that came without being long called for, indeed, so soon as it was practicable to have it, for without the almost simultaneous establishment of railways it would have been almost impossible to have introduced the system. The mail could not have carried the newspaper

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traffic and correspondence of the present day. The folded table-cloths of *Times*, the voluminous *Illustrated News*, the *Punch's*, the huge avalanches of papers that have broken upon the country within the last twenty years. Sir Moses Main-chance, unlike many country gentlemen, always had his letters forwarded to him wherever he went. He knew it was only the trouble of writing a line to the Post-office, saying re-direct my letters to so-and-so, to have what he wanted, and thus to keep pace with his correspondence. He was never overpowered with letters when he came home from a visit or tour, as some of our acquaintance are, thus making writing doubly repugnant to them.

The morning after his arrival at Lundyfoote Castle brought him a great influx of re-directed letters and papers. One from Mr. Heslop, asking him to meet at his house on the Friday week following, as he was going to have a party; one from Signior Quaverini, the eminent musician, offering his services for the hunt ball; one from Mr. Isinglass, the confectioner, hoping to be allowed to supply the ices and refreshments as usual; another (the fifth) from Mr. Mossman, about the damage to Mr. Anthill's sown grass; an envelope, enclosing the card and terms of Signior Dulcetto, an opposition musician, offering lower terms than Quaverini; a note from Mr. Paul Straddler, telling him about a horse to be bought dog cheap; and a "dead letter office" envelope, enclosing a blue ink written letter, directed to Master Anthony Thom, at the Sun-in-the-Sands Inn, Beechwood Green, stating that the party was not known at the address, re-introduces Mr. Geordey Gallon, a gentleman already known to the reader.

How this letter came to be sent to Sir Moses was as follows:—

When Mr. Geordey Gallon went upon the "Torf," as he calls it, becoming, as he considered, the associate of Princes, Prime Ministers, and so on, he bethought him of turning respectable, and giving up the stolen-goods-carrying-trade—a resolution that he was further confirmed in by the establishment of that troublesome, obnoxious corps the Hit-im and Hold-im shire Rural Police.

To this end, therefore, he gradually reduced the number of his Tippy-Tom-jaunts through the country by night, intimating

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to his numerous patrons that they had better suit themselves elsewhere ere he ceased travelling altogether.

Among the inconvenienced was our old friend Mrs. Margerum, long one of his most regular customers; for it was a very rare thing for Mr. Gallon not to find a carefully stitched-up bundle in the corner of Lawyer Hindmarch's cattle-shed, abutting on the Shillburn road, as he passed in his spring cart.

To remedy this serious inconvenience, Mrs. Margerum had determined upon inducting her adopted son, Master Anthony Thom, into the about-to-be-relinquished business; and Mr. Gallon having made his last journey, the accumulation of dripping caused by our hero's visit to Pangburn Park made it desirable to have a clearing-out as soon as possible.

To this end, therefore, she had written the letter now sent to Sir Moses; but, being a very prudent woman, with a slight smattering of law, she thought so long as she did not sign her surname at the end she was safe, and that no one could prove that it was from her. The consequence was, that Anthony Thom, not having shifted his quarters as soon as intended, the letter was refused at the sign of the Sun-in-the-Sands, and by dint of post-mark and contents, with perhaps a little *malice prepense* on the part of the Post-master, who had suffered from a dishonest housekeeper himself, it came into the hands of Sir Moses. At first our master of the hounds thought it was a begging-letter, and threw it aside accordingly; but in course of casting about for a fresh idea wherewith to propitiate Mr. Mossman about the sown grass, his eye rested upon the writing, which he glanced at, and glanced at, until somehow he thought he had seen it before. At length he took the letter up, and read what made him stare very much as he proceeded. Thus it ran:—

“PANGBURN PARK,
Thursday Night.

“MY OWN EVER DEAR ANTHONY THOM,

“I write to you, trusting you will receive this safe, to say that as Mr. George Gallon has discontinued travelling

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altogether, I must trust to you entirely to do what is necessary in futur, but you must be most careful and watchful, for these nasty Pollis fellers are about everywhere, and seem to think they have a right to look into every bodies basket and bundle. We live in terible times, I'm sure, my own beloved Anthony Thom, and if it wasn't for the hope that I may see you become a great gentleman, like Mr. George Gallon, I really think I would forswear place altogether, for no one knows the anxiety and misery of living with such a nasty, mean, covetous body as Old Nosey ; ”

“ Old Nosey ! ” ejaculated Sir Moses, stopping short in his reading, and feeling his proboscis ; “ Old Nosey ! dom it, can that mean me ? Do believe it does—and it's mother Margerum's handwriting—dom'd if it isn't,” continued he, holding the letter a little way off to examine and catch the character of the writing ; “ What does she mean by calling me a nasty, covetous body ? I that hunt the country, subscribe to the Infirmary, Agricultural Society, and do everything that's liberal and handsome. I'll Old Nosey her ! ” continued he, grinding his teeth, and giving a vigorous flourish of his right fist ; “ I'll Old Nosey her ! I'll turn her out of the house as soon as ever I get home, dom'd if I won't,” said Sir Moses, quivering with rage as he spoke. At length he became sufficiently composed to resume his reading—

“ —No one knows the anxiety and misery of living with such a nasty, mean covetous body as Old Nosey, who is always on the fret about expense, and thinks everybody is robbing him.”

“ Oh, dom it, that means me sure enough ! ” exclaimed Sir Moses ; “ that's on account of the row I was kicking up t'other day about the tea—declared I drank a pound a week myself. I'll tea her ! ” continued he, again turning to the letter and reading—

“ —I declare I'd a'most as soon live under a mistress as under such a shocking mean, covetous man.”

“ Would you ? ” muttered Sir Moses ; adding, “ you shall very soon have a chance then.” The letter thus continued—

“ —The old feller will be away on Saturday and Sunday,

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so come afore lightning on Monday morning, say about four o'clock, and I'll have everything ready to lower from my window."

"Oh the deuce!" exclaimed Sir Moses, slapping his leg; "Oh the deuce! going to rob the house, I declare!"

"—To lower from my window," read he again, "for it's not safe trusting things by the door as we used to do, now that these nasty knavish Pollis fellers are about; so now my own beloved Anthony Thom, if you will give a gentle wistle, or throw a little bit of soft dirt up at the window, where you will see a light burning, I'll be ready for you, and you'll be clear of the place long afore any of the lazy fellers here are up,—for a set of nastier, dirtier drunkards never were gathered together."

"Humph!" grunted Sir Moses, "that's a cut at Mr. Findlater." The writer then proceeded to say,—

"—But mind my own beloved Anthony Thom, if anybody questions you, say it's a parcel of dripping, and tell them they are welcome to look in if they like, which is the readiest way of stopping them from doing so. We have had a large party here, including a young gent from that fine old Lord Ladythorne, who I would dearly like to live with, and also that nasty, jealous, covetous body, Cuddy Flintoff, peeping and prying about everywhere as usual. He deserves to have a dish-clout pinned to his tail."

"*He, he, he!*" chuckled Sir Moses, as he read it.

"—I shall direct this letter by post to you at the sign of the Sun in the Sands, unless I can get it conveyed by a private hand. I am half in hopes Mr. Gallon may call, as there is going to be a great steeple match for an immense sum of money, £200 they say, and they will want his fine judgment to direct matters. Mr. Gallon is indeed a man of a thousand."

"Humph!" grunted Sir Moses, adding, "we are getting behind the curtain now." He then went on reading,—

"—Oh my own dear darling Anthony Thom! what would I give to see you a fine gentleman like Mr. George Gallon. I do hope and trust, dearest, that it may yet come to pass; but

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we must make money, and take care of our money when made, for a man is nothing without money. What a noble example you have before you in Mr. George Gallon! He was once no better nor you, and now he has everything like a gentleman, —a hunting horse to ride on, gold studs in his shirt, and goose for his dinner. O my own beloved Anthony Thom, if I could but see you on a white horse, with a flowered silk tie, and a cut velvet vest with bright steel buttons, flourishing a silver-mounted whip, how glad, how rejoiced it would make me. Then I shouldn't care for the pryings and grumblings of old Nosey, or the jealous watchings of the nasty, waspish set with which one is surrounded, for I should say my Anthony Thom will revenge and protect me, and make me comfortable at last. So now my own dearest Anthony Thom, be careful and guarded in coming about here, for I dread those nasty lurkin Pollis men more nor I can say, for I never knew suspicious people what were good for any thing themselves; and how they ever come to interduce such nasty town pests into the quiet peaceful country, I can't for the life of me imagine; but Mr. George Gallon, who is a man of great intellect, says they are dangerous, and that is partly why he has given up travelling; so therefore, my own dearest Anthony Thom, be guarded, and mind put on your pee jacket and red worsted comforter, for I dread these hoar frosts, and I'll have everything ready for my darling pet, so that you won't be kept waiting a moment; but mind if there's snow on the ground you don't come for fear of the tracks. I think I have littel more to say this time, my own darling Anthony Thom, except that I am, my own dear, dear son,

“ Your ever loving mother,

“ SARAH.”

“ B-o-o-y Jove!” exclaimed Sir Moses, sousing himself down in an easy chair beside the table at which he had been writing, “ b-o-y Jove, what a production! Regular robber, dom'd if she's not. Would give something to catch Master Anthony Thom, in his red worsted comforter, with his parcel of dripping. Would



"THERE, THEN SIGN THAT I.O.U."

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see whether I'd look into it or not. And Mr. Geordey Gallon, too! The impudent fellow who pretended not to know the Frenchman. Regular plant as ever was made. Will see whether he gets his money from me. Ten punds the wretch tried to do me out of by the basest deceit that ever was heard of. Con-found them, but I'll see if I can't be upsides with them all though," continued he, writhing for vengeance. And the whole of that day, and most of the night, and the whole of the following day when hunting at Harker Crag, he was thinking how he could manage it. At length, as he was going quietly home with the hounds, after only an indifferent day's sport, a thought struck him which he proceeded to put into execution as soon as he got into the house. He wrote a note to dear Lord Repartee, saying, if it would be quite convenient to Lady Repartee and his Lordship, he would be glad to stay all night with them before hunting Filberton forest; and leaving the unfolded note on the library table to operate during the night, he wrote a second one in the morning, inquiring the character of a servant; and putting the first note into the fire, he sealed the second one, and laid it ostentatiously on the hall table for the post.

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CHAPTER LXXIX.

MR. AND MRS. WOTHERSPOON.



E take it we all have some ambitious feeling to gratify—all have some one whom we either wish to visit, or who we desire should visit us. We will candidly state that our ambition is to dine with the Lord Mayor. If we could but achieve that great triumph, we really think we should rest satisfied the rest of our life. We know how it would elevate us in the eyes of such men as Cuddy Flintoff and Paul Straddler, and what an advantage it would be to us in society being able to talk in a familiar way of his Lordship (Lordship with a capital L, if you please, Mr. Printer).

Thus the world proceeds on the aspiring scale, each man looking to the class a little in advance of his own.

“ O knew they but their happiness, of men the happiest ” are the sporting country gentlemen who live at home at ease—unvexed alike with the torments of the money-maker and the anxieties of the great, and yet sufficiently informed and refined to be the companions of either—men who see and enjoy nature in all her moods and varieties, and live unfettered with the pomp and vexation of keeping up appearances, envying no one, whoever may envy them. If once a man quits this happy rank to breast the contending billows of party in hopes of rising to the one above it, what a harvest of discord he sows for his own reaping. If a man wants to be thoroughly disgusted with human nature, let him ally himself unreservedly to a political party. He will find cozening,

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and sneaking, and selfishness in all their varieties, and patriotic false pretences in their most luxuriant growth. But we are getting in advance of our subject, our thesis being Mr. and Mrs. Wotherspoon.

Our snuffy friend Spoon was not exempt from the ambitious failings of lesser men. His great object of ambition was to get Major Yammerton to visit him—or, perhaps, to put it more correctly, his great object of ambition was to visit Major Yammerton. But then, unfortunately, it requires two parties to these bargains; and Mrs. Yammerton wouldn't agree to it, not so much because old Spoon had been a butler, but because his wife (our pen splutters as it writes the objection) his wife had been a—a—housekeeper. A handsome housekeeper she was, too, when she first came into the country; so handsome, indeed, that Dicky Boggledyke had made two excursions over to their neighbour, Farmer Flamstead, to see her, and had reported upon her very favourably to the noble Earl, his august master.

Still Mrs. Yammerton wouldn't visit her. In vain Mrs. Wotherspoon sent her bantams' eggs, and guinea fowls' eggs, and cuttings from their famous yellow rose-tree; in vain old Spoon got a worn-out horse, and invested his nether man in white cords and top boots to turn out after the harriers; in vain he walked a hound in summer, and pulled down gaps, and lifted gates off their hinges in winter—it all only produced thanks and politeness. The Yammerton's and they were very good “How-do-you-do?” neighbours, but the true beef-and-mutton test of British friendship was wanting. The dinner is the thing that signs and seals the acquaintance.

Thus they had gone on from summer to summer, and from season to season, until hope deferred had not only made old Spoon's heart sick, but had also seen the white cords go at the knees, causing him to retire his legs into the military-striped cinnamon-coloured tweeds in which he appears at page 219 in the first volume. In addition to muffling his legs, he had begun to mutter and talk about giving up hunting,—getting old,—last season—and so on, which made

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the Major think he would be losing one of the most personable of his field. This made him pause and consider how to avert the misfortune. Hunted hares he had sent him in more than regular rotation ; he had liquored him repeatedly at the door ; the ladies had reciprocated the eggs and the cuttings, with dahlias, and Sir Harry strawberry runners ; and there really seemed very little left about the place wherewith to propitiate a refractory sportsman. At this critical juncture, a too confiding hare was reported by Cicely Bennett, farmer Merryfield's dairymaid, to have taken up her quarters among some tussuckey brambles at the north-east corner of Mr. Wotherspoon's cow pasture—a most unusual, indeed almost unprecedented circumstance, which was communicated by Wotherspoon in person to the Major at the next meet of the hounds at Girdle Stone Green, and received with unfeigned delight by the latter.

“ You don’t say so ! ” exclaimed he, wringing the old dandy’s hand ; “ you don’t say so ! ” repeated he, with enthusiasm, for hares were scarce, and the country good ; in addition to which the Major knew all the gaps.

“ *I do,*” replied Spoon, with a confident air, that as good as said, you may take my word for anything connected with hunting.

“ Well, then, I’ll tell you what we’ll do,” rejoined the Major, poking him familiarly in the ribs with his whip, “ I’ll tell you what we’ll do ; we’ll have a turn at her on Tuesday—meet at your house, eh ? what say you to that ? ”

“ With all my heart,” responded the delighted Wotherspoon ; adding, in the excitement of the moment, “ S’pose you come to breakfast ? ”

“ Breakfast,” gasped the Major, feeling he was caught. “ Dash it, what would Mrs. Yammerton say ? Breakfast ! ” repeated he, running the matter through his mind, the wigging of his wife, the walk of his hound, the chance of keeping the old boy to the fore if he went—go he would. “ With all my heart,” replied he, dashing boldly at the offer ; for it’s of no use a man saying he’s engaged to breakfast, and the Major felt

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that if the worst came to the worst, it would only be to eat two, one at home, the other with Spoon.

So it was settled, much to Mr. and Mrs. Wotherspoon's satisfaction, who were afterwards further delighted to hear that our friend Billy had returned, and would most likely be of the party. And most assiduously they applied themselves to provide for this, the great event of their lives.

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CHAPTER LXXX.

MR. WOTHERSPOON'S SEAT.



VY Bank Tower (formerly called Cowgate Hill), the seat of Jeames Wotherspoon, Esquire, stands on a gentle eminence about a stone's throw from Horseheath and Hinton turnpike road, and looks from the luxuriance of its ivy, like a great Jack-in-the-green.

Ivy is a troublesome thing, for it will either not grow at all, or it grows far too fast, and Wotherspoon's had fairly overrun the little angular red brick, red tiled mansion, and helped it to its new name of Ivy Bank Tower. If the ivy flourished, however, it was the only thing about the place that did; for Wotherspoon was no farmer, and the 75 A. 3 R. 18 P., of which the estate consisted, was a very uninviting looking property. Indeed Wotherspoon was an illustration of the truth of Sydney Smith's observation that there are three things which every man thinks he can do, namely, drive a gig, edit a newspaper, and farm a small property, and Spoon bought Cowgate Hill thinking it would "go of itself," as they say of a horse, and that in addition to the rent he would get the farmer's profit as well, which he was told ought to be equal to the rent. Though he had the Farmers' Almanack, he did not attend much to its instructions, for if Mrs. Wotherspoon wanted the Fe-a-ton, as she called it, to gad about the country in, John Strong, the plough-boy footman "loused" his team, and arraying himself in a chocolate-coloured coat, with a red striped vest and black velveteens, left the other horse standing idle for the day. So Spoon sometimes caught the season and sometimes

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he lost it; and the neighbours used to hope that he hadn't to live by his land. If he caught the season he called it good management; if he didn't he laid the blame upon the weather, just as a gardener takes the credit for all the good crops of fruit, and attributes the failures to the seasons. Still Spoon was not at all sensible of his deficiencies, and subscribed a couple of guineas a year to the Harrowford Agricultural Society, in return for which he always had the toast of the healths of the tenant farmers assigned to him, which he handled in a very magnificent and condescending way, acknowledging the obligations the landowners were under to them, and hoping the happy union would long subsist to their mutual advantage; indeed, if he could only have got the words out of his mouth as fast as he got the drink into it, there is no saying but he might some day have filled the presidential chair. Now, however, a greater honour even than that awaited him, namely, the honour of entertaining the great Major Yammerton to breakfast. To this end John Strong was first set to clean the very dirty windows, then to trim the ivy and polish the brass knocker at the door, next to dig the border, in which grew the famous yellow rose, and finally to hoe and rake the carriage-drive up to the house, while Mrs. Wotherspoon, aided by Sally Brown, her maid-of-all-work, looked out the best blue-and-gold china, examined the linen, selected a tongue, guillotined the poultry, bespoke the eggs, and arranged the general programme of the entertainment.

CHAPTER LXXXI.

MR. WOTHERSPOON'S DÉJEUNER A LA FOURCHETTE.



An Owl in an Ivy Bush.

THE Major thought himself very sly, and that he was doing the thing very cleverly by nibbling and playing with his breakfast on the appointed morning, instead of eating voraciously as usual; but ladies often know a good deal more than they pretend to do, and Mrs. Yammerton had seen a card from Mrs. Wother-spoon to their

neighbour, Mrs. Broadfurrow, of Blossomfield Farm, inviting Broadfurrow and her to a "*déjeuner à la fourchette*," to meet Major Yammerton and see the hounds. However, Mrs. Yammerton kept the fact to herself, thinking she would see how her Major would manœuvre the matter, and avoid a general acquaintance with the Wotherpoons. So she merely kept putting his usual viands before him, to try to tempt him into indulgence; but the Major, knowing the arduous part he would have to perform at the Tower, kept rejecting all her insidious

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overtures for eating, pretending he was not altogether right. “Almond pudding hadn’t agreed with him,” he thought. “Never did—should have known better than take it,” and so on.

Our dawdling hero rather disconcerted his host, for instead of applying himself sedulously to his breakfast, he did nothing but chatter and talk to the young ladies, as if there was no such important performance before them as a hare to pursue, or the unrivalled harriers to display. He took cup after cup, as though he had lost his reckoning, and also the little word “no” from his vocabulary. At length the Major got him raised from the table, by telling him they had two miles further to go than they really had, and making for the stable, they found Solomon and the footman whipper-in ready to turn out with the hounds. Up went our sportsmen on to their horses, and forth came the hounds wriggling and frolicking with joy. The cavalcade being thus formed, they proceeded across the fields, at the back of the house, and were presently passing up Hollington Lane. The gift grey was the first object of interest as soon as they got well under way, and the Major examined him attentively, with every desire to find fault.

“Neatish horse,” at length observed he, half to himself, half to our friend; “neatish horse—lightish of bone below the knee, p’rhaps, but still by no means a bad shaped ’un.”

Still though the Major couldn’t hit off the fault, he was pretty sure there was a screw loose somewhere, to discover which he now got Billy to trot the horse, and canter him, and gallop him, successively.

“Humph!” grunted he, as he returned after a brush over the rough ground of Farthingfield Moor; “he has the use of his legs—gets well away; easy horse under you, I dessay?” asked he.

Billy said he was, for he could pull him about anywhere; saying which he put him boldly at a water furrow, and landed handsomely on the far side.

“Humph!” grunted the Major again, muttering to himself, “May be all right—but if he is, it’s devilish unlike the Baronet,



One Bully quits at home.

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giving him. Wish he would take that confounded moon-eyed brute of mine and give me my forty puns back."

"And he gave him ye, did he?" asked the Major, with a scrutinising stare at our friend.

"Why—yarse—no—yarse—not exactly," replied Billy, hesitating. "The fact is, he offered to give me him, and I didn't like taking him, and so, after a good deal to do, he said I might give him fifty pounds for him, and pay him when it suited me."

"I twig," replied the Major, adding, "then you have to pay fifty pounds for him, eh?"

"Or return him," replied Billy, "or return him. He made me promise if ever I wanted to part with him, I would give him the refusal of him again."

"Humph!" grunted the Major, looking the horse over attentively. "Fifty puns," muttered he to himself,—"must be worth that if he's sound, and only eight off. Wouldn't mind giving fifty for him myself," thought he; "must be something wrong about him—certain of that—or Sir Moses wouldn't have parted with him;" with which firm conviction, and the full determination to find out the horse's weak point, the Major trotted along the Bodenham Road, through the little hamlet of Maywood, thence across Faulder the cattle jobber's farm, into the Heathfield Road at Gilden Bridge. A quarter of a mile further, and Mr. Wotherspoon's residence was full in sight.

The "Tower" never, perhaps, showed to greater advantage than it did on this morning, for a bright winter's sun lit up the luxuriant ivy on its angular gable-ended walls, nestling myriads of sparrows that flew out in flocks at the approach of each visitor.

"What place is this?" asked our hero, as, at a jerk of the Major's head, Solomon turned off the road through the now propped-open gate of the approach to the mansion.

"Oh, this is where we meet," replied the Major; "this is Mr. Wotherspoon's, the gentleman you remember out with us the day we had the famous run when we lost the hare at Mossheugh Law—the farm by the moor, you know, where the pretty woman was churning—you remember, eh?"

"O, ah!" replied Billy; "but I thought they called his place

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a Tower,—Ivy something Tower,” thinking this was more like two great sentry boxes placed at right angles, and covered with ivy, than anything else.

“ Well, yes ; he calls this a Tower,” replied the Major, seeing by Billy’s face that his friend had not risen in his estimation by the view of his mansion. “ Capital feller Spoon, though,” continued he, “ must go in and pay our respects to him and his lady.” So saying, he turned off the road upon the closely eaten sward, and, calling to Solomon to stop and let the hounds have a roll on the grass, he dismounted, and gave his horse in charge of a fustian-clad countryman, telling him to walk him about till he returned, and he would remember him for his trouble. Our friend Billy did the same, and knocking the mud sparks off his boots against the well pipe-clayed door-steps, prepared to enter the Tower. Before inducting them, however, let us prepare the inmates for their reception.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Wotherspoon had risen sufficiently early to enable them to put the finishing stroke to their respective arrangements, and then to apparel themselves for the occasion. They were gorgeously attired, vieing with the rainbow in the colour of their clothes. Old Spoon, indeed, seemed as if he had put all the finery on he could raise, and his best brown cauliflower wig shone resplendent with Macassar oil. He had on a light brown coat with a rolling velvet collar, velvet facings and cuffs, with a magnificent green, blue, and yellow striped tartan velvet vest, enriched with red cornelian buttons, and crossed diagonally with a massive Brazilian gold chain, and the broad ribbon of his gold double eye-glasses. He sported a light blue satin cravat, an elaborately worked ruby-studded shirt front, over a pink flannel vest, with stiff wrist-bands well turned up, showing the magnificence of his imitation India garnet buttons. On his clumsy fingers he wore a profusion of rings—a brilliant cluster, a gold and opal, a brilliant and sapphire, an emerald half-hoop ring, a massive mourning, and a signet ring—six in all—genuine or glass as the case might be, equally distributed between the dirty-nailed fingers of each hand. His legs were again encased in the treacherous white

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cords and woe-begone top-boots that were best under the breakfast table. He had drawn the thin cords on very carefully, hoping they would have the goodness to hang together for the rest of the day.

Mrs. Wotherspoon was bedizened with jewellery and machinery lace. She wore a rich violet-coloured velvet dress, with a beautiful machinery lace chemisette, fastened down the front with large Cairngorm buttons, the whole connected with a diminutive Venetian chain, which contrasted with the massive mosaic one that rolled and rattled upon her plump shoulders. A splendid imitation emerald and brilliant brooch adorned her bust, while her well-rounded arms were encircled with a mosaic gold, garnet, and turquoise bracelet, an imitation rose diamond one intermixed with pearl, a serpent armlet with blood-stone eyes, a heavy jet one, and an equally massive mosaic gold one with a heart's ease padlock. Though in the full development of womanhood, she yet distended her figure with crinoline, to the great contraction of her room.

The two had scarcely entered the little parlour, some twelve feet square, and Spoon got out his beloved Morning Post, ere Mr. and Mrs. Broadfurrow were seen wending their way up the road, at the plodding diligent sort of pace an agricultural horse goes when put into harness; and forthwith the Wotherspoons dismissed the last anxieties of preparation, and lapsed into the easy, unconcerned host and hostess. When John Strong threw open the door, and announced Mr. and Mrs. Broadfurrow, they were discovered standing over the fire, as if *déjeuner à la fourchette* giving was a matter of every day's occurrence with them. Then, at the summons, they turned and came forward in the full glow of cordiality, and welcomed their guests with all the fervour of sincerity: and when Mrs. Wotherspoon mounted the weather for a trot with Mrs. Broadfurrow, old Spoon out with his engine-turned gold snuff-box, and offered Broadfurrow a pinch ere he threw his conversation into the columns of his paper. The offer being accepted, Wotherspoon replenished his own nose, and then felt ready for anything. He was in high feather. He sunk his favourite topic, the

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doings of the House of Lords, and expatiated upon the Princess Royal's then approaching marriage. Oh, dear, he was so glad. He was so glad of it—glad of it on every account—glad of it on the Princess's account—glad of it on her most gracious Majesty's account. Bless her noble heart! it almost made him feel like an old man when he remembered the Prince Consort leading her to the hymeneal altar herself. Well, well, life was life, and he had seen as much of it as most men; and just as he was going to indulge in some of his high-flown reminiscences, the crack of a hunting whip sounded through the house, and farmer Nettlefold's fat figure, attired in the orthodox green coat and white cords of the Major Yammerton's hunt, was seen piled on a substantial brown cob, making his way to the stables at the back of the Tower. Mr. Nettlefold, who profanely entered by the back door, was then presently announced, and the same greetings having been enacted towards him, Wotherspoon made a bold effort to get back to the marriage, beginning with "As I was observing," when farmer Rintoul came trotting up on his white horse, and holloaed out to know if he could get him put up.

"Oh, certainly," replied Wotherspoon, throwing up the window, when a sudden gust of wind nearly blew off his wig, and sadly disconcerted the ladies by making the chimney smoke.

Just at this moment our friend appeared in sight, and all eyes were then directed to the now gambolling tongue-throwing hounds, as they spread frisking over the green.

"What beauties!" exclaimed Mrs. Wotherspoon, pretending to admire them, though in reality she was examining the Point de Paris lace on Mrs. Broadfurrow's mantle—wondering what it would be a yard, thinking it was very extravagant for a person like her to have it so broad. Old Spoon, meanwhile, hustled away to the door, to be ready to greet the great men as they entered.

"Major Yammerton and Mr. Jingle!" announced John Strong, throwing it open, and the old dandy bent nearly double with his bow.

"How are ye, Wotherspoon?" demanded our affable master

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shaking him heartily by the hand, with a hail-fellow-well-met air of cordiality. "Mr. Pringle you know," continued he, drawing our friend forward with his left hand, while he advanced with his right to greet the radiant Mrs. Wotherspoon.

The Major then went the round of the party, whole handing Mrs Broadfurrow, three fingering her husband, presenting two to old Rintoul, and nodding to Nettlefold.

"Well, here's a beautiful morning," observed he, now Colossus-of-Rhodesing with his clumsily built legs; "most remarkable season this I ever remember during the five-and-thirty years that I have kept haryers—more like summer than winter, only the trees are as bare of leaves as boot-trees, *haw, haw, haw*."

"*He, he, he,*" chuckled old Wotherspoon, "v-a-a-ry good, Major, v-a-a-ry good," drawled he, taking a plentiful replenishment of snuff as he spoke.

Breakfast was then announced, and the Major making up to the inflated Mrs. Wotherspoon tendered his arm, and with much difficulty piloted her past the table into the little duplicate parlour across the passage, followed by Wotherspoon with Mrs. Broadfurrow and the rest of the party.

And now the fruits of combined science appeared in the elegant arrangement of the breakfast-table, the highly polished plate vieing with the snowy whiteness of the cloth, and the pyramidal napkins encircling around. Then there was the show pattern tea and coffee services, chased in wreaths and scrolls, presented to Mr. Wotherspoon by the Duke of Thunder-downshire on his marriage; the Louis Quatorze kettle presented to Mrs. Wotherspoon by the Duchess, with the vineleaf-patterned cake-basket, the Sutherland-patterned toast-rack, and the tulip-patterned egg-stand, the gifts and testimonials of other parties.

Nor was the entertainment devoted to mere show, for piles of cakes and bread of every shape and make were scattered profusely about, while a couple of covered dishes on the well polished little sideboard denoted that the fourchette of the card was not a mere matter of form. Best of all, a group of flat

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vine-leaf encircling Champagne glasses denoted that the repast was to be enlivened with the exhilarating beverage.

The party having at length settled into seats, Major Yammerton on Mrs. Wotherspoon's right, Mr. Pringle on her left, Mrs. Broadfurrow on Spoon's right, her husband on his left, with Rintoul and Nettlefold filling in the interstices, breakfast began in right earnest, and Mrs. Wotherspoon having declined the Major's offer of assisting with the coffee, now had her hands so full distributing the beverages as to allow him to apply himself sedulously to his food. This he did most determinedly, visiting first one detachment of cakes, then another, and helping himself liberally to both hashed woodcocks and kidneys from under the covers. His quick eye having detected the Champagne glasses, and knowing Wotherspoon's reputed connoisseurship in wines, he declined Mrs. Wotherspoon's tea, reserving himself for what was to follow. In truth, Spoon was a good judge of wine, so much so that he acted as a sort of decoy duck to à London house, who sent him very different samples to the wine they supplied to the customers with whom he picked up. He had had a great deal of experience in wines, never, in the course of a longish life, having missed the chance of a glass, good, bad, or indifferent. We have seen many men set up for judges without a tithe of Wotherspoon's experience. Look at a Club for instance. We see the footman of yesterday transformed into the butler of to-day, giving his opinion to some newly joined member on the next, with all the authority of a professor—talking of vintages, and flavours, and roughs, and smooths, and sweets, and drys, as if he had been drinking wine all his life. Wotherspoon's prices were rather beyond the Major's mark, but still he had no objection to try his wine, and talk as if he would like to have some of the same sort. So having done ample justice to the eatables he turned himself back in his chair and proceeded to criticise Mrs. Wotherspoon's now slightly flushed face, and wonder how such a pretty woman could marry such a snuffy old cock. While this deliberate scrutiny was going on, the last of the tea-drinkers died out, and at a pull of the bell, John Strong came in, and

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after removing as many cups and saucers as he could clutch, he next proceeded to decorate the table with Champagne glasses amid the stares and breath-drawings of the company.

While this interesting operation was proceeding, the old dandy host produced his snuff-box, and replenishing his nose passed it on to Broadfurrow to send up the table, while he threw himself back in his chair and made a mental wager that Strong would make a mistake between the Champagne and the Sillery. The glasses being duly distributed, and the Major's eye at length caught, our host after a prefatory throat-clearing hem thus proceeded to address him, individually, for the good of the company generally.

"Major Yammerton," said he, "I will take the liberty of recommending a glass of Sillery to you.—The sparkling, I believe, is very good, but the still is what I particularly pride myself upon and recommend to my friends."

"Strong!" continued he, addressing the clown, "the Sillery to Major Yammerton;" looking at Strong as much as to say, "you know it's the bottle with the red cord round the neck."

The Major, however, like many of us, was not sufficiently versed in the delicacies of Champagne drinking to prefer the Sillery, and to his host's dismay called for the sparkling stuff that Wotherspoon considered was only fit for girls at a boarding school. The rest of the party, however, were of the Major's opinion, and all glasses were eagerly held for the sparkling fluid, while the Sillery remained untouched to the master.

It is but justice to Wotherspoon to add, that he showed himself deserving of the opportunity, for he immediately commenced taking two glasses to his guests' one.

That one having been duly sipped and quaffed and applauded, and a becoming interval having elapsed between, Mr. Wotherspoon next rose from his chair, and looking especially wise, observed, up the table, "that there was a toast he wished—he had—he had—he wished to propose, which he felt certain under any—any (pause) circumstances, would be (pause again) accepted—he meant, received with approbation (applause), not only with approbation, but enthusiasm," continued he, hitting

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off the word he at first intended to use, amid renewed applause, causing a slight "this is my health" droop of the head from the Major—"But when," continued the speaker, drawing largely on his snuff-box for inspiration; "But when in addition to the natural and intrinsic (pause) merit of the (hem) illustrious individual" ("Coming it strong," thought the Major, who had never been called illustrious before), "there is another and a stronger reason," continued Wotherspoon, looking as if he wished he was in his seat again—"a reason that comes 'ome to the 'earts and symphonies of us all (applause). ("Ah, that's the hounds," thought the Major, "only I s'pose he means sympathies.") "I feel (pause) assured," continued Mr. Wotherspoon, "that the toast will be received with the enthusiasm and popularity that ever attends the (pause) mention of intrinsic merit, however (pause) 'umbly and inadequately the (pause) toast may be (pause) proposed," (great applause, with cries of no, no,) during which the orator again appealed to his snuff-box. He knew he had a good deal more to say, but he felt he couldn't get it out. If he had only kept his seat he thought he might have managed it. "I therefore," said he, helping Mrs. Broadfurrow to the sparkling, and passing the bottle to her husband while he again appealed to the Sillery, "beg to propose, with great sincerity, the 'ealth of Her most gracious Majesty THE QUEEN! THE QUEEN! GOD BLESS HER!" exclaimed Wotherspoon, holding up a brimming bumper ere he sank into his chair to enjoy it.

"With all my heart!" gasped the disgusted Major, writhing with vexation—observing to Mrs. Wotherspoon as he helped her, and then took severe toll of the passing bottle himself, "by Jove, your husband ought to be in Parliament—never heard a man acquit himself better"—the Major following the now receding bottle with his eye, whose fast diminishing contents left little hopes of a compliment for himself out of its contents. He therefore felt his chance was out, and that he had been unduly sacrificed to Royalty. Not so, however, for Mr. Wotherspoon, after again charging his nose with snuff, and passing his box round the table while he collected his scattered

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faculties for the charge, now drew the bell-cord again, and tapping with his knife against the empty bottle as “Strong” entered, exclaimed, “Champagne!” with the air of a man accustomed to have all the wants of life supplied by anticipation. There’s nobody gets half so well waited upon as an old servant.

This order being complied with, and having again got up the steam of his eloquence, Mr. Wotherspoon arose, and, looking as wise as before, observed, “That there was another toast he had to propose, which he felt (pause) sure would (pause) would be most agreeable and acceptable to the meeting,—he meant to say the party, the present party (applause)—under any circumstances (sniff, snuff, sneeze); he was sure it would be most (snuff) acceptable for the great and distinguished (pause), he had almost said illustrious (sniff), gentleman (pause), was—was estimable”—

“This is me, at all events,” thought the Major, again slightly drooping his too bashful head, as though the shower-bath of compliment was likely to be too heavy for him.

“—was estimable (pause) and glorious in every relation of life (applause), and keeps a pack of hounds second to none in the kingdom (great applause, during which the drooping head descended an inch or two lower). I need not after that (snuff) expression of your (sniff) feelings (pause), undulate on the advantage such a character is to the country, or in promoting (pause) cheerful hospitality in all its (pause) branches, and drawing society into sociable communications; therefore I think I shall (pause) offer a toast most, most heartily acceptable (sniff) to all your (snuff) feelings, when I propose, in a bumper toast, the health of our most—most distinguished and—and hospitable host—guest, I mean—Major Yammerton, and his harriers!” saying which, the old orator filled himself a bumper of Sillery, and sent the sparkling beverage foaming and creaming on its tour. He then presently led the charge with a loud, “Major! your very good health!”

“Major, your very good health!” “Your very good health, Major!” “Major, your very good health!” then followed up as quickly as the glasses could be replenished, and the last

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explosion having taken place, the little Major arose, and looked around him like a Bantam cock going to crow. He was a man who could make what he would call an off-hand speech, provided he was allowed to begin with a particular word, and that word was "for." Accordingly, he now began with—

"Ladies and gentlemen, *For* the very distinguished honour you have thus most unexpectedly done me, I beg to return you my most grateful and cordial thanks. (Applause.) I beg to assure you, that the 'steem and approbation of my perhaps too partial friends, is to me the most gratifying of compliments; and if during the five-and-thirty years I have kept haryers, I have contributed in any way to the 'armony and good fellowship of this neighbourhood, it is indeed to me a source of unfeigned pleasure. (Applause.) I 'ope I may long be spared to continue to do so. (Renewed applause.) Being upon my legs, ladies and gentlemen," continued he, "and as I see there is still some of this most excellent and exhilarating beverage in the bottle (the Major holding up a half-emptied one as he spoke), permit me to conclude by proposing as a toast the 'ealth of our inestimable 'ost and 'ostess—a truly exemplary couple, who only require to be known to be respected and esteemed as they ought to be. (Applause.) I have great pleasure in proposing the 'ealth of Mr. and Mrs. Wotherspoon! (Applause.) Mrs. Wotherspoon," continued he, bowing very low to his fair hostess, and looking, as he thought, most insinuating, "your *very* good 'ealth! Wotherspoon!" continued he, standing erect, and elevating his voice, "Your *very* good 'ealth!" saying which he quaffed off his wine, and resumed his seat as the drinking of the toast became general.

Meanwhile old Wotherspoon had taken a back hand at the Sillery, and again rose, glass in hand, to dribble out his thanks for the honour the Major and company had done Mrs. Wotherspoon and himself, which being the shortest speech he had made, was received with the greatest applause.

All parties had now about arrived at that comfortable state when the inward monitor indicates enough, and the active-minded man turns to the consideration of the "next article,

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mem,"—as the teasing shopkeepers say. The Major's "next article," we need hardly say, was his haryers, which were still promenading in front of the ivy-mantled tower, before an admiring group of pedestrians and a few sorrily mounted horsemen—old Duffield, Dick Trail, and one or two others—who would seem rather to have come to offer up their cattle for the boiler, than in expectation of their being able to carry them across country with the hounds. These are the sort of people who stamp the farmers' hedges down, and make hare hunting unpopular.

"Well, sir, what say you to turning out?" now asked our master, as Wotherspoon still kept working away at the Sillery, and maunding on to Mr. Broadfurrow about the Morning Post and high life.

"Well, sir, what you think proper," replied Spoon, taking a heavy pinch of snuff, and looking at the empty bottles on the table.

"The hare, you say, is close at hand," observed our master of hounds.

"Close at hand, close at hand—at the corner of my field, in fact," assented Wotherspoon, as if there was no occasion to be in a hurry.

"Then let's be at her!" exclaimed the Major, rising with wine-inspired confidence, and feeling that it would require a very big fence to stop him with the hounds in full cry.

"Well, but we are going to see you, ain't we?" asked Mrs. Wotherspoon.

"By all means," replied our Master; adding, "but hadn't you better get your bonnet on?"

"Certainly," rejoined Mrs. Wotherspoon, looking significantly at Mrs. Broadfurrow; whereupon the latter rose, and with much squeezing, and pardoning, and thank-you-ing, the two succeeded in effecting a retreat. The gentlemen then began kicking their legs about, feeling as though they would not want any dinner that day.

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CHAPTER LXXXII.

THE COUNCIL OF WAR



HILE the ladies were absent adorning themselves, the gentlemen held a council of war as to the most advisable mode of dealing with the hare, and the best way of making her face a good country. The Major thought if they could set her a-going with her head towards Martinfield-heath, they would stand a good chance of a run ; while Broadfurrow feared Borrowdale brook would be in the way.

"Why not Linacres ?" asked Mr. Rintoul, who preferred having the hounds over any one's farm but his own.

"Linacres is not a bad line," assented the Major thoughtfully ; "Linacres is not a bad line, 'specially if she keeps clear of Minsterfield-wood and Dowland preserve ; but if once she gets to the preserve it's all U. P., for we should have as many hares as hounds in five minutes, to say nothing of Mr. Grumbleton reading the riot act among us to boot."

"I'll tell ye how to do, then," interposed fat Mr. Nettlefold, holding his coat laps behind him as he protruded his great canary-coloured stomach into the ring ; "I'll tell you how to do then. Just crack her away back over this way, and see if you can't get her for Witherton and Longworth. Don't you mind," continued he, button-holing the Major, "what a hunt we had aboot eighteen years since with a har we put off old Tommy Carman's stubble, that took us reet away over Marbury Plot, the Oakley hill, and then reet down into Woodbury Vale, where we killed ?"

"To be sure I do !" exclaimed the delighted Major, his keen

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eyes glistening with pleasure at the recollection. "The day Sam Snowball rode into Gallowfield bog and came out as black as a sweep—I remember it well. Don't think I ever saw a better thing. If it had been a—a—certain somebody's hounds (*he, he, he!*), whose name I won't mention (*haw, haw, haw!*), we should never have heard the last of it (*he, he, he!*)."

While this interesting discussion was going on, old Wother-spoon, who had been fumbling at the lock of the cellaret, at length got it open, and producing therefrom one of those little square fibre-protected bottles, with mysterious seals and hieroglyphical labels, the parti-coloured letters leaning different ways, now advanced, gold-dotted liquor-glass in hand, towards the group, muttering as he came, "Major Yammerton, will you 'blege me with your 'pinion of this Maraschino di Zara, which my wine merchants recommend to me as something very 'tickler,'" pouring out a glass as he spoke, and presenting it to his distinguished guest.

"With all my heart," replied the Major, who rather liked a glass of liquor; adding, "we'll all give our opinion, won't we, Pringle?" appealing to our hero.

"Much pleasure," replied Billy, who didn't exactly know what it was, but still was willing to take it on trust.

"That's right," rejoined old Spoon; "that's right; then 'blege me," continued he, "by helping yourselves to glasses from the sideboard," nodding towards a golden-dotted brood clustering about a similarly adorned glass jug like chickens around a speckled hen.

At this intimation a move was made to the point; and all being duly provided with glasses, the luscious beverage flowed into each in succession, producing hearty smacks of the lips, and "very goods" from all.

"Well, I think so," replied the self-satisfied old Dandy; "I think so," repeated he, replenishing his nose with a good pinch of snuff; "Comes from Steinberger and Leoville, of King Street, Saint Jeames's—very old 'quaintance of mine—great house in the days of George the Fourth of festive memory. And, by the way, that reminds me," continued he, after a long-

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drawn respiration, "that I have forgotten a toast that I feel
(pause) we ought to have drunk, and——"

"Let's have it now then," interrupted the Major, presenting his glass for a second helping.

"If you please," replied Wotherspoon, thus cut short in his oration, proceeding to replenish the glasses, but with more moderate quantities than before.

"Well, now what's your toast?" demanded the Major, anxious to be off.

"The toast I was about to propose—or rather, the toast I forgot to propose," proceeded the old twaddler, slowly and deliberately, with divers intermediate sniffs and snuffs, was a toast that I feel 'sured will come 'ome to the 'arts and symphonies of us all, being no less a—a—(pause) toast than the toast of the illustrious (pause), exalted—I may say, independent—I mean Prince—Royal 'Ighness in fact—who (wheeze) is about to enter into the holy state of matrimony with our own beloved and exalted Princess (Hear, hear, hear). I therefore beg to (pause) propose that we drink the 'ealth of His Royal 'Ighness Prince (pause) Frederick (snuff) William (wheeze) Nicholas (sniff) Charles!" with which correct enunciation the old boy brightened up and drank off his glass with the air of a man who has made a clean breast of it.

"Drink both their 'ealths!" exclaimed the Major, holding up his glass, and condensing the toast into "The 'ealths of their Royal Highnesses!" it was accepted by the company with great applause.

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CHAPTER LXXXIII.

POOR PUSS AGAIN.



UST as the last of the glasses was drained, and the lip-smacking guests were preparing to restore them to the sideboard, a slight rustle was heard at the door, which opening gently, a smart black velvet bonnet trimmed with cerise-coloured velvet and leaves, and broad cerise-coloured ribbons, piloted Mrs. Wotherspoon's pretty face past the post, who announced that Mrs. Broadfurrow and she were ready to go whenever they were.

"Let's be going, then," exclaimed Major Yammerton, hurrying to the sideboard and setting down his glass. "How shall it be, then? How shall it be?" appealing to the company. "Give them a view or put her away quietly?—give them a view or put her away quietly?"

"Oh, put her away quietly," responded Mr. Broadfurrow, who had seen many hares lost by noise and hurry at starting.

"With her 'ead towards Martinfield?" asked the Major.

"If you can manage it," replied Broadfurrow, well knowing that these sort of feats are much easier planned than performed.

"S'pose we let Mrs. Wotherspoon put her away for us," now suggested Mr. Rintoul.

"By all means!" rejoined the delighted Major; "by all means! She knows the spot, and will conduct us to it. Mrs. Wotherspoon," continued he, stumping up to her as she now stood waiting in the little passage, "allow me to have the honour of offering you my arm;" so saying, the Major presented it to her, observing confidentially as they passed on to

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the now open front door, “I feel as if we were going to have a clipper ! ” lowering the ominous hat-string as he spoke.

“ Solomon ! Solomon ! ” cried he, to the patient huntsman, who had been waiting all this time with the hounds. “ We are going ! we are going ! ”

“ Yes, Major,” replied Solomon, with a respectful touch of his cap.

“ Now for it ! ” cried the Major, wheeling sharp round with his fair charge, and treading on old Wotherspoon’s gouty foot, who was following too closely behind with Mrs. Broadfurrow on his arm, causing the old cock to catch up his leg and spin round on the other, thus splitting the treacherous cords across the knee.

“ *Oh-o-o-o !* ” shrieked he, wrinkling his face up like a Norfolk biffin, and hopping about as if he was dancing a hornpipe.

“ *Oh-o-o-o !* ” went he again, on setting it down to try if he could stand.

“ I really beg you ten thousand pardons ! ” now exclaimed the disconcerted Major, endeavouring to pacify him. “ I really beg you ten thousand pardons ; but I thought you were ever so far behind.”

“ So did I, I’m sure,” assented Mrs. Wotherspoon.

“ You’re such a gay young chap, and step so smartly, you’d tread on anybody’s heels,” observed the Major jocularly.

“ Well, but it was a pincher, I assure you,” observed Wotherspoon, still screwing up his mouth.

At length he got his foot down again, and the assault party was re-formed, the Major and Mrs. Wotherspoon again leading, old Spoon limping along at a more respectful distance with Mrs. Broadfurrow, while the gentlemen brought up the rear with the general body of pedestrians, who now deserted Solomon and the hounds in order to see poor puss started from her form. Solomon was to keep out of sight until she was put away.

Passing through the little American-blighted orchard, and what Spoon magnificently called his kitchen garden, consisting of a dozen grass-grown gooseberry bushes, and about as many



MR. WOTHERSPOON'S GOUTY FOOT.

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winter cabbages, they came upon a partially-ploughed fallow, with a most promising crop of couch grass upon the unturned part, the hungry soil looking as if it would hardly return the seed.

“Fine country! fine country!” muttered the Major, looking around on the sun-bright landscape, and thinking he could master it whichever way the hare went. Up Sandywell Lane for Martinfield Moor, past Woodrow Grange for Linacres, and through Farmer Fulton’s fold-yard for Witherton.

Oh, yes, he could do it; and make a very good show out of sight of the ladies.

“Now, where have you her? where have you her?” whispered he, squeezing Mrs. Wotherspoon’s plump arm to attract her attention, at the same time not to startle the hare.

“O, in the next field,” whispered she, “in the next field,” nodding towards a drab-coloured pasture in which a couple of lean and dirty cows were travelling about in search of a bite. They then proceeded towards it.

The gallant Major having opened the ricketty gate that intervened between the fallow and it, again adopted his fair charge, and proceeded stealthily along the high ground by the ragged hedge on the right, looking back and holding up his hand for silence among the followers.

At length Mrs. Wotherspoon stopped. “There, you see,” said she, nodding towards a piece of rough, briary ground, on a sunny slope, in the far corner of the field.

“I see!” gasped the delighted Major; “I see!” repeated he, “just the very place for a hare to be in—wonder there’s not one there always. Now,” continued he, drawing his fair charge a little back, “we’ll see if we can’t circumvent her, and get her to go to the west. Rintoul!” continued he, putting his hand before his mouth to prevent the sound of what he said being wafted to the hare. “Rintoul! you’ve got a whip—you go below and crack her away over the hill, that’s a good feller, and we’ll see if we can’t have something worthy of com-mem-mo-ration”—the Major thinking how he would stretch out

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the run for the newspapers — eight miles in forty minutes, an hour and twenty with only one check—or something of that sort.

The pause thrilled through the field, and caused our friend Billy to feel rather uncomfortable. He didn't appreciate the beauties of the thing.

Rintoul having now got to his point, and prepared his heavy whip-thong, the gallant band advanced, in semicircular order, until they came within a few paces of where the briars began. At a signal from the Major they all halted. The excitement was then intense.

"I see her!" now whispered the Major into Mrs. Wotherspoon's ear. "I see her!" repeated he, squeezing her arm, and pointing inwardly with his thong-gathered whip.

Mrs. Wotherspoon's wandering eyes showed that she did not participate in the view.

"Don't you see the tuft of fern just below the thick red-berried rose bush a little to the left here?" asked the Major; "where the rushes die out?"

Mrs. Wotherspoon nodded assent.

"Well, then, she's just under the broken piece of fern that lies bending this way. You can see her ears moving at this moment."

Mrs. Wotherspoon's eyes brightened as she saw a twinkling something.

"Now then, put her away!" said the Major gaily.

"She won't bite, will she?" whispered Mrs. Wotherspoon, pretending alarm.

"Oh, bite, no!" laughed the Major; "hares don't bite—not pretty women at least," whispered he. "Here take my whip and give her a touch behind," handing it to her as he spoke.

Mrs. Wotherspoon having then gathered up her violet-coloured velvet dress a little, in order as well to escape the frays of the sharp-toothed brambles as to show her gay red and black striped petticoat below, now advanced cautiously into the rough sea, stepping carefully over this tussuck and t'other,

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avoiding this briar and that, until she came within whip reach of the fern. She then paused, and looked back with the eyes of England upon her.

“*Up with her!*” cried the excited Major, as anxious for a view as if he had never seen a hare in his life.

Mrs. Wotherspoon then advanced half a step further, and protruding the Major’s whip among the rustling fern, out sprang—what does the reader think?—A GREAT TOM CAT!

“*Tallyho!*” cried Billy Pringle, deceived by the colour.

“*Hoop, hoop, hoop!*” went old Spoon, taking for granted it was a hare.

Crack! resounded Rintoul’s whip from afar.

“*Haw, haw, haw!*” never saw anything like that! ” roared the Major, holding his sides.

“Why, it’s a cat!” exclaimed the now enlightened Mrs. Wotherspoon, opening wide her pretty eyes as she retraced her steps towards where he stood.

“Cat, ay, to be sure, my dear! why, it’s your own, isn’t it?” demanded our gallant Master.

“No; ours is a grey—that’s a tabby,” replied she, returning him his whip.

“Grey or tab, it’s a cat,” replied the Major, eyeing puss climbing up a much-lopped ash-tree in the next hedge.

“Why, Spoon, old boy, don’t you know a cat when you see her?” demanded he, as his chagrined host now came pottering towards them.

“I thought it was a hare, ‘pon honour, as we say in the Lords,” replied the old buck, bowing and consoling himself with a copious pinch of snuff.

“Well, it’s a sell,” said the Major, thinking what a day he had lost.

“D-a-a-vilish likely place for a hare,” continued old Wotherspoon, reconnoitring it through his double eye-glasses; “D-a-a-vilish likely place, indeed.”

“Oh, likely enough,” muttered the Major, with a chuck of his chin, “likely enough—only it isn’t one, *that’s all!*”

“Well, I wish it had been,” rejoined the old boy.



Old Mother Hubbard's "Hare"

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"So do I," simpered his handsome wife, drawing her fine lace-fringed kerchief across her lips.

The expectations of the day being thus disappointed, another council of war was now held, as to the best way of retrieving the misfortune. Wotherspoon, who was another instance of the truth of the observation, that a man who is never exactly sober is never quite drunk, was inclined to get back to the bottle. "Better get back to the house," said he, "and talk matters quietly over before the fire;" adding, with a full replenishment of snuff up his nose, "I've got a batch of uncommonly fine Geisenheimer that I would like your 'pinion of, Major;" but the Major, who had had wine enough, and wanted to work it off with a run, refused to listen to the tempter, intimating, in a whisper to Mrs. Spoon, who again hung on his arm, that her husband would be much the better of a gallop.

And Mrs. Wotherspoon, thinking from the haziness of the old gentleman's voice, and the sapient twinkling of his gooseberry eyes, that he had had quite enough wine, seconded this view of the matter; whereupon, after much backing and bowing, and shaking of hands, and showing of teeth, the ladies and gentlemen parted, the former to the fire, the latter to the field, where the performance of the pack must stand adjourned for another chapter.

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CHAPTER LXXXIV.

A FINE RUN!



Billy in Pursuit.

HE worst of these *déjeuners à la fourchette*, and also of luncheons, is, that they waste the day, and then send men out half-wild to ride over the hounds or whatever else comes in their way. The greatest funkers, too, are oftentimes the boldest under the influence of false courage; so that the chances of mischief are considerably increased. The mounted Champagne bottle smoking a cigar, at page 103 in the first volume, is a good illustration of what we mean.

We doubt not Mr. Longneck was very forward in that run.

All our Ivy Tower party were more or less primed, and even old Wotherspoon felt as if he could ride. Billy, too, mounted the gallant grey without his usual nervous misgivings, and trotted along between the Major and Rintoul with an easy Hyde Park-ish sort of air. Rintoul had intimated that he thought they would find a hare on Mr. Merryweather's farm at Swayland, and now led them there by the fields, involving

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two or three little obstacles—a wattled hurdle among the rest—which they all charged like men of resolution. The hurdle wasn't knocked over till the dogs'-meatmen came to it.

Arrived at Swayland, the field quickly dispersed, each on his own separate hare-seeking speculation, one man fancying a fallow, another a pasture; Rintoul reserving the high hedge near the Mill bridle-road, out of which he had seen more than one whipped in his time. So they scattered themselves over the country, flipping and flopping all the tufts and likely places, aided by the foot-people with their sticks, and their pitchings and tossings of stones into bushes and hollows, and other tempting-looking retreats.

The hounds, too, ranged far and wide, examining critically each likely haunt, pondering on spots where they thought she had been, but which would not exactly justify a challenge.

While they were all thus busily employed, Rintoul's shallow hat in the air intimated that the longed-for object was discerned, causing each man to get his horse by the head, and the foot-people to scramble towards him, looking anxiously forward and hurriedly back, lest any of the riders should be over them. Rintoul had put her away, and she was now travelling and stopping, and travelling and stopping, listening and wondering what was the matter. She had been coursed before but never hunted, and this seemed a different sort of proceeding.

The terror-striking notes of the hounds, as they pounced upon her empty form, with the twang of the horn and the cheers of the sportsmen urging them on, now caused her to start; and, laying back her long ears, she scuttled away over Bradfield Green and up Ridge Hill as hard as ever she could lay legs to the ground.

“Come along, Mr. Pringle! come along, Mr. Pringle!” cried the excited Major, spurring up, adjusting his whip as if he was going to charge into a solid square of infantry. He then popped through an open gate on the left.

The bustling beauties of hounds had now fallen into their established order of precedence, Lovely and Lilter contending for the lead, with Bustler and Bracelet, and Ruffler and

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Chaunter, and Ruin and Restless, and Dauntless and Driver, and Dancer and Flaunter and others striving after, some giving tongue because they felt the scent, others, because the foremost gave it.—So they went truthfully up the green and over the hill, a gap, a gate, and a lane serving the bustling horsemen.

The vale below was not quite so inviting to our “green linnets” as the country they had come from, the fields being small, with the fences as irregular as the counties appear on a map of England. There was none of that orderly squaring up and uniformity of size, that enables a roadster to trace the line of communication by gates through the country.—All was zigzag and rough, indicating plenty of blackthorns and briars to tear out their eyes. However, the Champagne was sufficiently alive in our sportsmen to prevent any unbecoming expression of fear, though there was a general looking about to see who was best acquainted with the country. Rintoul was now out of his district, and it required a man well up in the line to work them satisfactorily, that is to say, to keep them in their saddles, neither shooting them over their horses’ heads nor swishing them over their tails. Our friend Billy worked away on the grey, thinking, if anything, he liked him better than the bay. He even ventured to spur him.

The merry pack now swing musically down the steep hill, the chorus increasing as they reach the greener regions below. The fatties, and funkers, and ticklish forelegged ones, begin who-a-ing and g-e-e-ntly-ing to their screws, holding on by the pommels and cantrells, and keeping their nags’ heads as straight as they can. Old Wotherspoon alone gets off and leads down. He’s afraid of his horse slipping upon its haunches. The sight of him doing so emboldens our Billy, who goes resolutely on, and incautiously dropping his hand too soon, the grey shot away with an impetus that caused him to cannon off Broadfurrow and the Major and pocket himself in the ditch at the bottom of the hill. Great was the uproar! The Richest Commoner in England was in danger! Ten thousand a year in jeopardy! “Throw yourself off!” “Get clear of him!” “Keep hold of him!” “Mind he doesn’t



"LOOK SHARP, OR YOU'LL LOSE HIM!"

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strike ye!" resounded from all parts, as first the horse's head went up, and then his tail, and then his head again, in his efforts to extricate himself.

At length Billy, seizing a favourable opportunity, threw himself off on the greensward, and, ere he could rise, the horse, making a desperate plunge, got out, and went staring away with his head in the air, looking first to the right and then to the left, as the dangling reins kept checking and catching him.

"Look sharp, or you'll lose him!" now cried old Duffield, as after an ineffectual snatch at the reins by a passing countryman, the horse ducked his head and went kicking and wriggling and frolicking away to the left, regardless of the tempting cry of the hounds.

The pace, of course, was too good for assistance—and our friend and the field were presently far asunder.

Whatever sport the hounds had—and of course they would have a clipper—we can answer for it Mr. Pringle had a capital run; for his horse led him a pretty Will-o'-the-wisp sort of dance, tempting him on and on by stopping to eat whenever his rider—or late rider, rather—seemed inclined to give up the chase, thus deluding him from field to lane and from lane to field until our hero was fairly exhausted.—Many were the rushes and dashes and ventures made at him by hedgers and ditchers and drainers, but he evaded them all by laying back his ears and turning the battery of his heels for their contemplation, as if to give them the choice of a bite or a kick.

At length he turned up the depths of the well-known Love Lane, with its paved *trottoir*, for the damsels of the adjoining hamlets of East and West Woodhay to come dry-shod to the gossip-shop of the well; and here, dressed in the almost-forgotten blue bodice and red petticoat of former days, stood pretty Nancy Bell, talking matrimonially to Giles Bacon, who had brought his team to a stand-still on the higher ground of the adjoining hedge, on the field above.

Hearing the clatter of hoofs, as the grey tried first the hard and then the soft of the lane, Bacon looked that way; and seeing a loose horse he jumped bodily into the lane, extending

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his arms and his legs, and his eyes and his mouth in a way that was very well calculated to stop even a bolder animal than a horse. He became a perfect barrier. The grey drew up with an indignant snort and a stamp of his foot, and turning short round he trotted back, encountering in due time his agitated and indignant master, who had long been vowing what a trimming he would give him when he caught him. Seeing Billy in a hurry,—for animals are very good judges of mischief, as witness an old cock how he ducks when one picks up a stone,—seeing Billy in a hurry, we say, the horse again wheeled about, and returned with more leisurely steps towards his first opponent. Bacon and Nancy were now standing together in the lane ; and being more pleasantly occupied than thinking about loose horses, they just stood quietly and let him come towards them, when Giles's soothing w-ho-o-ays and matter-of-course style beguiled the horse into being caught.

Billy presently came shuffling up, perspiring profusely, with his feet encumbered with mud, and stamping the thick of it off while he answered Bacon's question as to "hoo it happened," and so on, in the grumpy sort of a way a man does who has lost his horse, he presented him with a shilling, and remounting, rode off, after a very fine run of at least twenty minutes.

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CHAPTER LXXXV.

THE MAINCHANCE CORRESPONDENCE.



HE first thing our friend did, when he got out of sight of Giles Bacon and Nancy, was to give his horse a good rap over the head with his whip for its impudent stupidity in running away, causing him to duck his head and shake it, as if he had got a pea or a flea in his ear. He then began wheeling round and round, like a dog wanting to lie down, much to Billy's alarm, for he didn't wish for any more nonsense. That performance over, he again began ducking and shaking his head, and then went moodily on, as if indifferent to consequences. Billy wished he mightn't have hit him too hard.

When he got home, he mentioned the horse's extraordinary proceedings to the Major, who, being a bit of a vet. and a strong suspector of Sir Moses' generosity to boot, immediately set it down to the right cause—megrims—and advised Billy to return him forthwith, intimating that Sir Moses was not altogether the thing in the matter of horses; but our friend, who kept the blow with the whip to himself, thought he had better wait a day or two and see if the attack would go off.—In this view he was upheld by Jack Rogers, who thought his old recipe, “leettle drop gin,” would set him all right, and proceeded to administer it to himself accordingly. And the horse improved so much that he soon seemed himself again, whereupon Billy, recollecting Sir Moses' strenuous injunctions to give him the refusal of him if ever he wanted to part with him, now addressed him the following letter:—

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" YAMMERTON GRANGE.

" DEAR SIR MOSES,

" As I find I must return to town immediately after the hunt ball, to which you were so good as to invite me, and as the horse you were so good as to give me would be of no use to me there, I write, in compliance with my promise to offer him back to you if ever I wanted to part with him, to say that he will be quite at your service after our next day's hunting, or before if you like, as I daresay the Major will mount me if I require it. He is a very nice horse, and I feel extremely obliged for your very handsome intentions with regard to him, which, under other circumstances, I should have been glad to accept. Circumstanced as I am, however, he would be wasted upon me, and will be much better back in your stud.

" I will, therefore, send him over on hearing from you ; and you can either put my I. O. U. in the fire, or enclose it to me by the Post.

" Again thanking you for your very generous offer, and hoping you are having good sport, I beg to subscribe myself,

" Dear Sir Moses,

" Yours very truly,

" WM. PRINGLE.

" To SIR MOSES MAINCHANCE, BART.,
PANGBURN PARK."

And having sealed it with the great seal of state, he handed it to Rougier to give to the postman, without telling his host what he had done.

The next post brought the following answer :—

" MANY, very many thanks to you, my dear Pringle, for your kind recollection of me with regard to the grey, which I assure you stamps you in my opinion as a most accurate and excellent young man.—You are quite right in your estimate of my opinion of the horse ; indeed, if I had not considered him something very far out of the common way, I should not have put him into your hands ; but knowing him to be as good as he's handsome, I had very great satisfaction in placing him with you, as

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well on your own account as from your being the nephew of my old and excellent friend and brother baronet, Sir Jonathan Pringle—to whom I beg you to make my best regards when you write.

“ Even were it not so, however, I should be precluded from accepting your kind and considerate offer ; for only yesterday I sent Wetun into Doubleimpshire, to bring home a horse I’ve bought of Tom Toweler, on Paul Straddler’s recommendation, being, as I tell Paul, the last I’ll ever buy on his judgment, unless he turns out a trump, as he has let me in for some very bad ones.

“ But, my dear Pringle, ain’t you doing yourself a positive injustice in saying that you would have no use for the grey in town ? Town, my dear fellow, is the very place for a horse of that colour, figure, and pretension ; and a very few turns in the Park, with you on his back, before that best of all penny-worths, the chair-sitting swells, might land you in the highest ranks of the aristocracy—unless, indeed, you are booked elsewhere, of which, perhaps, I have no business to inquire.

“ I may, however, as a general hint, observe to the nephew of my old friend, that the Hit-im and Hold-im shire Mammas don’t stand any nonsense, so you will do well to be on your guard. No ; take my advice, my dear fellow, and ride that horse in town.—It will only be sending him to Tat.’s if you tire of him there, and if it will in any way conduce to your peace of mind, and get rid of any high-minded feeling of obligation, you can hand me over whatever you get for him beyond the 50l.—And that reminds me, as life is uncertain, and it is well to do everything regularly, I’ll send my agent, Mr. Mordecai Nathan, over with your I. O. U., and you can give me a bill at your own date—say two or three months—instead, and that will make us all right and square, and, I hope, help to maintain the truth of the old adage, that short reckonings make long friends—which I assure you is a very excellent one.

“ And now, having exhausted both my paper and subject, I shall conclude with repeating my due appreciation of your

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kind recollection of my wishes ; and with best remembrances to your host and hostess, not forgetting their beautiful daughters, whom I hope to see in full feather at the ball, I remain,

“ My dear Pringle,

“ Very truly and sincerely yours,

“ MOSES MAINCHANCE.

“ TO WM. PRINGLE, ESQ., AT MAJOR YAMMERTON'S,
“ YAMMERTON GRANGE,
“ HIT-IM AND HOLD-IM SHIRE.”

We need scarcely add that Mr. Mordecai Nathan followed quickly on the heels of the letter, and that I. O. U. became a short-winded bill of exchange, thus saddling our friend permanently with the gallant grey. And when Major Yammerton heard the result, all the consolation Billy got from him was, “ *I told you so,*” meaning that he ought to have taken his advice, and returned the horse as unsound.

With this episode about the horse, let us return to Pangburn Park.

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CHAPTER LXXXVI.

THE ANTHONY THOM TRAP.



SIR MOSES was so fussy about his clothes, sending to the laundry for this shirt and that, censuring the fold of this cravat and that, inquiring after his new hunting ties and best boots, that Mrs. Margerum began to fear the buxom widow, Mrs. Vivian, was going to be at Lord Repartee's, and that she might be saddled with that direst of all dread inflictions to an honest, conscientious housekeeper, a teasing, worreting, meddling mistress. That is a calamity which will be best appreciated by the sisterhood, and those who watch how anxiously "widowers and single gentlemen" places are advertised for in the newspapers, by parties who frequently, not perhaps unaptly, describe themselves as "thoroughly understanding their business."

Sir Moses, indeed, carried out the deception well; for not only in the matter of linen, but in that of clothes also, was he equally particular, insisting upon having all his first-class daylight things brought out from their winter quarters, and reviewing them himself as they lay on the sofa, ere he suffered Mr. Bankhead to pack them.

At length they were sorted and passed into the capacious depths of an ample brown leather portmanteau, and the key being duly turned and transferred to the Baronet, the package itself was chucked into the dog-cart in the unceremonious sort of way luggage is always chucked about. The vehicle itself then came to the door, and Sir Moses having delivered his last injunctions about the hounds and the horses, and the

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line of coming to cover so as to avoid public-houses, he ascended and touching the mare gently with the whip, trotted away amid the hearty “well shut of yous” of the household. Each then retired to his or her private pursuits; some to drink, some to gamble, some to write letters, Mrs. Margerum, of course, to pick up the perquisites. Sir Moses, meanwhile, bowled away ostentatiously through the lodges, stopping to talk to everybody he met, and saying he was going away for the night.

Bonmot Park, the seat of Lord Repartee, stands about the junction of Hit-im and Hold-imshire with Featherbedfordshire. Indeed, his great cover of Tewington Wood is neutral between the hunts, and the best way to the park on wheels, especially in winter time, is through Hinton and Westleak, which was the cause of Sir Moses hitting upon it for his deception, inasmuch as he could drive into the Fox and Hounds Hotel, and at Hinton, under pretence of baiting his mare, without exciting suspicion, and there make his arrangements for the night. Accordingly, he took it very quietly after he got clear of his own premises, coveting rather the shades of evening that he had suffered so much from before, and, as luck would have it, by driving up Skinner Lane, instead of through Nelson Street, he caught a back view of Paul Straddler, as for the twenty-third time that worthy peeped through the panes of Mrs. Winship, the straw-bonnet maker’s window in the market-place, at a pretty young girl she had just got from Stow-newton. Seeing his dread acquaintance under such favourable circumstances, Sir Moses whipped Whimpering Kate on, and nearly upset himself against the kerb-stone as he hurried up the archway of the huge deserted house—the mare’s ringing hoofs alone announcing his coming.

“Ostler! Ostler! OSTLER!” cried he, in every variety of tone, and at length the crooked-legged individual filling that and other offices, came hobbling and scratching his head to the summons. Sir Moses alighting then, gave him the reins and whip; and wrapper in hand, proceeded to the partially gas-lit door in the archway, to provide for himself while the ostler looked after the mare.

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Now, it so happened, that what with bottle ends and whole bottles, and the occasional contributions of the generous, our friend Peter the waiter was even more inebriated than he appears at page 67 ; and the rumbling of gig-wheels up the yard only made him waddle into the travellers' room, to stir the fire and twist up a bit of paper to light the gas, in case it was any of the despised brotherhood of the road. He thought very little of bagmen—Mr. Customer was the man for his money. Now, he rather expected Mr. Silesia, Messrs. Buckram the clothiers' representative, if not Mr. Jaconette, the draper's also, about this time ; and meeting Sir Moses hurrying in top-coated and cravated with the usual accompaniments of the road, he concluded it was one of them ; so capped him on to the commercial room with his dirty duster-holding hand.

“Get me a private room, Peter ; get me a private room,” demanded the Baronet, making for the bottom of the staircase away from the indicated line of scent.

“Private room,” muttered Peter. “Why, who is it ?”

“Me! me!” exclaimed Sir Moses, thinking Peter would recognise him.

“Well, but whether are ye—a tailor or a draper ?” demanded Peter, not feeling inclined to give way to the exclusiveness of either.

“Tailor or draper ! you stupid old sinner—don’t you see it’s me—me, Sir Moses Mainchance ?”

“Oh, Sir Moses, Sir, I beg your pardon, Sir,” stammered the now apologising Peter, hurrying back towards the staircase. “I really beg your pardon, Sir ; but my eyes are beginning to fail me, Sir—not so good as they were when Mr. Customer hunted the country. Well, Sir Moses, Sir, I hope you’re well, Sir ; and whether will you be in the Sun or the Moon ? You can have a fire lighted in either in a minute, only you see we don’t keep fires constant no ways now, ’cept in the commercial room.—Great change, Sir Moses, Sir, since Mr. Customer hunted the country ; yes, Sir, great change—used to have fires in every room, Sir, and brandy and——”

“Well, but,” interrupted Sir Moses, “I can’t sit freezing



SIR MOSES ENJOYING HIS CHOP.

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upstairs till the fire's burnt up.—You go and get it lighted, and come to me in the commercial room and tell me when it's ready ; and here ! ” continued he, “ I want some dinner in an hour's time or so.”

“ By all means, Sir Moses. What would you like to take, Sir Moses ? ” as if there was everything at command.

Sir Moses—“ Have you any soup ? ”

Peter—“ Soup, Sir Moses. No, I don't think there is any soup.”

Sir Moses—“ Fish ; have you any fish ? ”

Peter—“ Why, no ; I don't think there'll be any fish to-day, Sir Moses.”

Sir Moses—“ What have you, then ? ”

Peter—(Twisting the dirty duster), “ Mutton chops—beef steak—beef steak—mutton chops—boiled fowl, p'raps you'd like to take ? ”

‘ *Sir Moses*—“ No, I shouldn't (*muttering*, most likely got to be caught and killed yet.) Tell the cook,” continued he, speaking up, “ to make on a wood and coal fire, and to do me a nice dish of mutton chops on the gridiron ; not in the frying-pan mind, all swimming in grease ; and to boil some mealty potatoes.”

Peter—“ Yes, Sir Moses ; and what would you like to have to follow ? ”

“ *Cheese !* ” said Sir Moses, thinking to cut short the inquiry. “ And hark'e,” continued Sir Moses : “ Don't make a great man of me by bringing out your old battered copper showing-dishes ; but tell the cook to send the chops up hot and hot, between good warm crockery-ware plates, with ketchup or Harvey sauce for me to use as I like.”

“ Yes, Sir Moses,” replied Peter, toddling off to deliver as much of the order as he could remember.

And Sir Moses having thawed himself at the commercial room fire, next visited the stable to see that his mare had been made comfortable, and told the ostler post-boy boots to be in the way, as he should most likely want him to take him out in the fly towards night. As he returned he met Bessey

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Bannister, the pretty chambermaid, now in the full glow of glossy hair and crinoline, whom he enlisted as purveyor of the mutton into the Moon, in lieu of the antiquated Peter, whose services he was too glad to dispense with. It certainly is a considerable aggravation of the miseries of a country inn to have to undergo the familiarities of a dirty privileged old waiter. So thought Sir Moses, as he enjoyed each succeeding chop, and complimented the fair maiden so on her agility and general appearance, that she actually dreamt she was about to become Lady Mainchance !

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CHAPTER LXXXVII.

THE ANTHONY THOM TAKE.



IR MOSES MAINCHANCE, having fortified himself against the night air with a pint of club port, and a glass of pale brandy after his tea, at length ordered out the inn fly, without naming its destination to his fair messenger. These vehicles, now so generally scattered throughout the country, are a great improvement on the old yellow post-chaise, that made such a hole in a sovereign, and such a fuss in getting ready, holloaing, “Fust pair out!” and so on, to give notice to a smock-frocked old man to transform himself into a scarlet or blue jacketed post-boy by pulling off his blouse, and who, after getting a leg-up and a ticket for the first turnpike gate, came jingling, and clattering, and cracking his dog-whip round to the inn door, attracting all the idlers and children to the spot, to see who was going to get into the “chay.” The fly rumbles quietly round without noise or pretension, exciting no curiosity in any one’s mind; for it is as often out as in, and may only be going to the next street, or to Woodbine Lodge, or Balsam Bower, on the outskirts of the town, or for an hour’s airing along the Featherbedfordshire or the old London Road. It does not even admit of a pull of the hair as a hint to remember the ostler as he stands staring in at the window, the consequence of which is, that the driver is generally left to open the door for his passenger himself. Confound those old iniquities of travelling!—a man used never to have his hand out of his pocket. Let not the rising generation resuscitate the evil, by

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contravening the salutary regulation of not paying people on railways.

Sir Moses hearing the sound of wheels, put on his wraps; and, rug in hand, proceeded quietly downstairs, accompanied only by the fair Bessey Bannister, instead of a flight of dirty waiters, holloaing, "Coming down! coming down! now then, look sharp!" and so on.

The night was dark, but the ample cab-lamps threw a gleam over the drab and red lined door that George Beer the driver held back in his hand to let his customer in.

"Good night, my dear," said Sir Moses, now slyly squeezing Miss Bannister's hand, wondering why people hadn't nice clean quiet-stepping women to wait upon them, instead of stuck-up men, who thought to teach their masters what was right, who wouldn't let them have their plate warmers in the room, or arrange their tables according to their own desires.—With these and similar reflections he then dived head foremost into the yawning abyss of a vehicle. "Bang," went the door, and Beer then touched the side of his hat for instructions where to go to.

"Let me see," said Sir Moses, adjusting his rug as if he hadn't quite made up his mind. "Let me see—oh, ah! drive me northwards, and I'll tell you further when we stop at the Slopewell turnpike-gate." So saying Sir Moses drew up the jingling window, Beer mounted the box, and away the old perpetual-motion horse went nodding and knuckling over the uneven cobble-stone pavement, varying the motion with an occasional bump and jump at the open channels of the streets. Presently a smooth glide announced the commencement of Macadam, and shortly after the last gas-lamp left the road to darkness and to them. All was starlight and serene, save where a strip of newly lain gravel grated against the wheels, or the driver objurgated a refractory carter for not getting out of his way. Thus they proceeded at a good, steady, plodding sort of pace, never relaxing into a walk, but never making any very vehement trot.

At the Slopewell gate Sir Moses told Beer to take a ticket

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for the Winterton Burn one ; arrived at which, he said, " Now go on and stop at the stile leading into the plantation, about half a mile on this side of my lodges," adding, " I'll walk across the park from there ; " in obedience to which the driver again plied his whip along the old horse's ribs, and in due time the vehicle drew up at the footpath alongside the plantation.—The door then opened, Sir Moses alighted and stood waiting while the man turned his fly round and drove off, in order to establish his night eyes ere he attempted the somewhat intricate passage through the plantation to his house.

The night, though dark, was a good deal lighter than it appeared among the gloom of the houses and the glare of the gaslights at Hinton ; and if he was only well through the plantation, Sir Moses thought he should not have much difficulty with the rest of the way. So conning the matter over in his mind, thinking whereabouts the boards over the ditch were, where the big oak stood near, which the path led to the left, he got over the stile, and dived boldly into the wood.

The Baronet made a successful progress, and emerged upon the open space of Coldnose, just as the night breeze spread the twelve o'clock notes of his stable clock through the frosty air upon the quiet country.

" All right," said he to himself, sounding his repeater to ascertain the hour, as he followed the tortuous track of the footpath, through cowslip pasture, over the fallow and along the side of the turnip field ; he then came to the turn from whence in daylight the first view of the house is obtained.

A faint light glimmered in the distance, about where he thought the house would be situate.

" Do believe that's her room," said Sir Moses, stopping and looking at the light. " Do believe that's her signal for beloved Anthony Thom. If I catch the young scoundrel," continued he, hurrying on, " I'll—I'll—I'll break every bone in his skin." With this determination, Sir Moses put on as fast as the now darker lower ground would allow, due regard being had to not missing his way.

ASK MAMMA.

At length he came to the cattle hurdles that separated the east side of the park from the house, climbing over which he was presently among the dark yews and hollies, and box-bushes of the shrubbery. He then paused to reconnoitre.—The light was still there.—If it wasn't Mrs. Margerum's room it was very near it; but he thought it was hers by the angle of the building and the chimneys at the end. What should he do?—Throw a pebble at the window and try to get her to lower what she had, or wait and see if he could take Anthony Thom, cargo and all? The night was cold, but not sufficiently so, he thought, to stop the young gentleman from coming, especially if he had his red worsted comforter on; and as Sir Moses threw his rug over his own shoulders, he thought he would go for the great haul, at all events, especially as he felt he could not converse with Mrs. Margerum *à la* Anthony Thom, should she desire to have a little interchange of sentiment. With this determination he gathered his rug around him, and proceeded to pace a piece of open ground among the evergreens like the captain of a ship walking the quarter-deck, thinking now of his money, now of his horses, now of Miss Bannister, and now of the next week's meets of his hounds.—He had not got half through his current of ideas when a footstep sounded upon the gravel walk; and, pausing in his career, Sir Moses distinctly recognised the light patter of someone coming towards him. He down to charge like a pointer to his game, and as the sound ceased before the light-showing window, Sir Moses crept stealthily round among the bushes, and hid behind a thick ground-sweeping yew, just as a rattle of peas broke upon the panes.

The sash then rose gently, and Sir Moses participated in the following conversation:—

Mrs. Margerum (from above)—“O, my own dearly beloved Anthony Thom, is that you, darling! But don't, dear, throw such big 'andfuls, or you'll be bricking the winder.”

Master Anthony Thom (from below)—“No, mother; only I thought you might be asleep.”

Mrs. Margerum—“Sleep, darling, and you coming! I never sleep when my own dear Anthony Thom is coming! Bless

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your noble heart! I've been watching for you this—I don't know how long."

Master Anthony Thom—"Couldn't get Peter Bateman's cuddy to come on."

Mrs. Margerum—"And has my Anthony Thom walked all the way?"

Master Anthony Thom—"No; I got a cast in Jackey Lishman the chimbley-sweep's car as far as Burnfoot Bridge. I've walked from there."

Mrs. Margerum—"Bless his sweet heart! And had he hisworsted comforter on?"

Master Anthony Thom—"Yes; goloshes and all."

Mrs. Margerum—"Ah, goloshes are capital things. They keep the feet warm, and prevent your footsteps from being heard. And has my Anthony Thom got the letter I wrote to him at the Sun in the Sands?"

Master Anthony Thom—"No,—never heard nothin' of it."

Mrs. Margerum—"No! Why what can ha' got it?"

Master Anthony Thom—"Don't know.—Makes no odds.—I got the things all the same."

Mrs. Margerum—"O, but my own dear Anthony Thom, but it does. Mr. George Gallon says it's very foolish for people to write anything if they can 'elp it—they should always send messages by word of mouth. Mr. Gallon is a man of great intellect, and I'm sure what he says is right, and I wish I had it back."

Master Anthony Thom—"O, it'll cast up some day, I'll be bound.—It's of no use to nobody else."

Mrs. Margerum—"I hope so, my dear. But it is not pleasant to think other folks may read what was only meant for my own Anthony Thom. However, it's no use crying over spilt milk, and we must manish better another time. So now look out, my beloved, and I'll lower what I have."

So saying, a grating of cord against the window-sill announced a descent, and *Master Anthony Thom*, grasping the load, presently cried, "All right!"

Mrs. Margerum—"It's not too heavy for you, is it dear?"

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Master Anthony Thom (hugging the package)—“O, no ; I can manish it. When shall I come again, then, mother ?” asked he, preparing to be off.

Mrs. Margerum—“Oh, bless your sweet voice, my beloved. When shall you come again, indeed ? I wish I could say very soon ; but, dearest, it’s hardly safe, these nasty pollis fellers are always about, besides which, I question if old Nosey may be away again before the ball ; and as he’ll be all on the screw for a while, to make up for past expense, I question it will be worth coming before then. So, my own dear Anthony Thom, s’pose we say the ball night, dear, about this time o’ night, and get a donkey to come on as far as the gates, if you can, for I dread the fatigue ; and if you could get a pair of panniers, so much the better, you’d rise easier and carry your things better, and might have a few fire-bricks or hearth-stones to put at the top, to pretend you were selling them, in case you were stopped—which, however, I hope won’t be the case, my own dear ; but you can’t be too careful, for it’s a sad, sinful world, and people don’t care what they say of their neighbours. So now, my own dearest Anthony Thom, good night, and draw your worsted comforter close round your throat, for colds are the cause of half our complaints, and the night air is always to be dreaded ; and take care that you don’t overheat yourself, but get a lift as soon as you can, only mind who it is with, and don’t say you’ve been here, and be back on the ball night. So good night, my own dearest Anthony Thom, and take care of yourself, whatever you do, for——”

“Good night, mother,” now interrupted Anthony Thom, adjusting the bundle under his arm, and with repeated “Good night, my own dearest” from her, he gave it a finishing jerk, and turning round, set off on his way rejoicing.

Sir Moses was too good a sportsman to holloa before his game was clear of the cover ; and he not only let Anthony Thom’s footsteps die out on the gravel walk, but the sash of Mrs. Margerum’s window descend ere he withdrew from his hiding-place and set off in pursuit. He then went tip-toeing along after him, and was soon within hearing of the heavily laden lad.

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"Anthony Thom, my dear! Anthony Thom," whispered he, coming hastily upon him, as he now turned the corner of the house.

Anthony Thom stopped and trembling violently exclaimed, "O, Mr, Gallon, is it you?" "Yes, my dear, it's me," replied Sir Moses, adding, "you've got a great parcel, my dear; let me carry it for you," taking it from him as he spoke.

Shriek! shriek! scream! now went the terrified Thom, seeing into whose hands he had fallen. "O you dom'd young rascal," exclaimed Sir Moses, muffling him with his wrapper,— "I'll draw and quarter you if you make any noise. Come this way, you young miscreant!" added he, seizing him by the worsted comforter and dragging him along past the front of the house to the private door in the wall, through which Sir Moses disappeared when he wanted to evade Mons. Rougier's requirements for his steeple-chase money.

That passed, they were in the stable-yard, now silent save the occasional stamp of the foot or roll of the halter of some horse that had not yet lain down. Sir Moses dragged his victim to the door in the corner leading to the whipper-in's bedroom, which, being open, he proceeded to grope his way upstairs. "Harry! Joe! Joe! Harry!" holloaed he, kicking at the door.

Now, Harry was away, but Joe was in bed; indeed he was having a hunt in his sleep, and exclaimed as the door at length yielded to the pressure of Sir Moses' foot. "'Od rot it! Don't ride so near the hounds, man!'

"Joe!" repeated Sir Moses, making up to the corner from whence the sound proceeded. "Joe! Joe!" roared he still louder.

"O, I beg your pardon! I'll open the gate!" exclaimed Joe, now throwing off the bed-clothes and bounding vigorously on to the floor.

"Holloa!" exclaimed he, awaking and rubbing his eyes. "Holloa! who's there?"

"Me," said Sir Moses, "me,"—adding: "Don't make a row, but strike a light as quick as you can; I've got a bag fox I want to show you."



"COME THIS WAY, YOU YOUNG MISCREANT!"

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"Bag fox, have you?" replied Joe, now recognising his master's voice, making for the mantel-piece and feeling for the box. "Bag fox, have you? Dreamt we were in the middle of a run from Ripley Coppice, and that I couldn't get old Crusader over the brook at no price." He then hit upon the box, and with a scrape of a lucifer the room was illuminated.

Having lit a mould candle that stood stuck in the usual pint-bottle neck, Joe came with it in his hand to receive the instructions of his master.

"Here's a dom'd young scoundrel I've caught lurking about the house," said Sir Moses, pushing Anthony Thom towards him, "and I want you to give him a good hiding."

"Certainly, Sir Moses; certainly," replied Joe, taking Anthony Thom by the ear as he would a hound, and looking him over amid the whining and whimpering and beggings for mercy of the boy.

"Why this is the young rascal that stole my Sunday shirt off Mrs. Saunders's hedge!" exclaimed Joe, getting a glimpse of Anthony Thom's clayey complexioned face.

"No, it's not," whined the boy. "No, it's not. I never did nothin' o' the sort."

"Nothin' of the sort!" retorted Joe, "why there ain't two hugly boys with hare lips a-runnin' about the country," pulling down the red-worsted comforter, and exposing the deformity as he spoke.

"It's you all over," continued he, seizing a spare stirrup leather, and proceeding to administer the buckle-end most lustily. Anthony Thom shrieked and screamed, and yelled and kicked, and tried to bite; but Joe was an able practitioner, and Thom could never get a turn at him.

Having finished one side, Joe then turned him over, and gave him a duplicate beating on the other side.

"There! that'll do: kick him downstairs!" at length cried Sir Moses, thinking Joe had given him enough; and as the boy went bounding head foremost down, he dropped into his mother's arms, who, hearing his screams, had come to the rescue.

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Joe and his master then opened the budget and found the following goods :—

2 lb. of tea	1 bar of brown soap
1 lb. of coffee	$\frac{1}{2}$ lb. of currants
3 lb. of brown sugar	1 lb. of rushlights
3 lb. of starch	1 roll of cocoa
2 oz. of nutmegs	1 lb. of orange peel
1 lb. of mustard	1 bottle of capers
1 bar of pale soap	1 quart of split peas in a dirty

cotton night-cap, marked C. F.; doubtless, as Sir Moses said, one of Cuddy Flintoff's.

"Dom all such dripping," said Sir Moses, as he desired Joe to carry the things to the house. "No wonder that I drank a great deal of tea," added he, as Joe gathered them together.

"Who the deuce would keep house that could help it?" muttered Sir Moses, proceeding on his way to the mansion, thinking what a trouncing he would give Mrs. Margerum ere he turned her out of doors.

ASK MAMMA.

CHAPTER LXXXVIII.

ANOTHER COUNCIL OF WAR.



RS. MARGERUM having soothed and pressed her beautiful boy to her bosom, ran into the house, and hurrying on the everlasting pheasant-feather bonnet in which she was first introduced to the reader, and a faded red and green tartan cloak hanging under it, emerged at the front door just as Sir Moses and Joe entered at the back one, vowing that she would have redress if it cost her a fi' pun note. Clutching dear Anthony Thom by the waist, she made the best of her way down the evergreen walk, and skirting the gardens, got upon the road near the keeper's lodge. "Come along, my own dear Anthony Thom," cried she, helping him along, "let us leave this horrid wicked hole.—Oh, dear! I wish I'd never set foot in it; but I'll not have my Anthony Thom chastised by any nasty old clothesman—no, that I won't, if it cost me a fifty pun note"—continued she, burning for vengeance. But Anthony Thom had been chastised notwithstanding, so well, indeed, that he could hardly hobble—seeing which, Mrs. Margerum halted, and again pressing him to her bosom, exclaimed, "Oh, my beloved Anthony Thom can't travel; I'll take him and leave him at Mr. Hindmarch's, while I go and consult Mr. Gallon."—So saying, she suddenly changed her course, and crossing Rye-hill green, and the ten-acre field adjoining, was presently undergoing the *wow-wow*, *wow-wow* of the farmer lawyer's

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dog, Towler. The lawyer, ever anxious for his poultry, was roused by the noise; and after a rattle of bolts, and sliding of a sash, presented his cotton night-capped head at an upper window, demanding in a stentorian voice "Who was there?"

"Me! Mr. Hindmarch, me! Mrs. Margerum; for pity's sake take us in, for my poor dear boy's been most shemfully beat." "Beat, has he!" exclaimed the lawyer, recognising the voice, his ready wit jumping to an immediate conclusion; "beat, has he!" repeated he, withdrawing from the window to fulfil her behest, adding to himself as he struck a light and descended the staircase, "that'll ha' summut to do with the dripping, I guess—always thought it would come to mischief at last." The rickety door being unbolted and opened, Mrs. Margerum and her boy entered, and Mrs. Hindmarch having also risen and descended, the embers of the kitchen fire were resuscitated, and Anthony Thom was examined by the united aid of a tallow candle and it. "Oh, see! see!" cried Mrs. Margerum, pointing out the wales on his back,—"was there ever a boy so shemfully beat? But I'll have revenge on that villainous man,—that I will, if it cost me a hundred pun note." The marks seen, soothed, and deplored, Mrs. Hindmarch began inquiring who had done it. "Done it! that nasty old Nosey," replied Mrs. Margerum, her eyes flashing with fire; "but I'll make the mean feller pay for it," added she,—"that I will."

"No, it wasn't old No-No-Nosey, mo-mo-mother," now sobbed Anthony Thom, "it was that nasty Joe Ski-Ski-Skinner."

"Skinner, was it, my priceless jewel," replied Mrs. Margerum, kissing him, "I'll skin him; but Nosey was there, wasn't he, my pet?"

"O, yes, Nosey was there," replied Anthony Thom, "it was him that took me to Ski-Ski-Skinner"—the boy bursting out into a fresh blubber, and rubbing his dirty knuckles into his streaming eyes as he spoke.

"O that Skinner's a bad un," gasped Mrs. Margerum, "always said he was a mischievous, dangerous man; but I'll

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have satisfaction of both him and old Nosey," continued she, "or I'll know the reason why."

The particulars of the catastrophe being at length related (at least as far as it suited Mrs. Margerum to tell it), the kettle was presently put on the renewed fire, a round table produced, and the usual consolation of the black bottle resorted to. Then as the party sat sipping their grog, a council of war was held as to the best course of proceeding. Lawyer Hindmarch was better versed in the law of landlord and tenant—the best way of a tenant doing his landlord,—than in the more recondite doctrine of master and servant, particularly the delicate part relating to perquisites; and though he thought Sir Moses had done wrong in beating the boy, he was not quite sure but there might be something in the boy being found about the house at an unseasonable hour of the night. Moreover, as farming times were getting dull, and the lawyer was meditating a slope *à la* Henerey Brown & Co., he did not wish to get mixed up in a case that might bring him in collision with Sir Moses or his agent, so he readily adopted Mrs. Margerum's suggestion of going to consult Mr. George Gallon. He really thought Mr. Gallon would be the very man for her to see. Geordey was up to everything, and knew nicely what people could stand by, and what they could not; and lawyer Hindmarch was only sorry his old grey gig-mare was lame, or he would have driven her up to George's at once. However, there was plenty of time to get there on foot before morning, and they would take care of Anthony Thom till she came back, only she must be good enough not to return till nightfall; for that nasty suspicious Nathan was always prowling about, and would like nothing better than to get him into mischief with Sir Moses.—And that point being settled, they replenished their glasses, and drank success to the mission; and having seen the bclaboured Anthony Thom safe in a shakedown, Mrs. Margerum borrowed Mrs. Hindmarch's second best bonnet, a frilled and beaded black velvet' one with an ostrich feather, and her polka jacket, and set off on foot for the Rose and Crown beer-shop, being escorted to their door by her host and hostess, who assured

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her it wouldn't be so dark when she got away from the house a bit.

And that point being accomplished, lawyer and Mrs. Hind-march retired to rest, wishing they were as well rid of Anthony Thom, whom they made no doubt had got into a bad scrape, in which they wished they mightn't be involved.

ASK MAMMA.

CHAPTER LXXXIX.

MR. GALLON AT HOME



SLUGGISH winter's day was just dragging its lazy self into existence as Mrs. Margerum came within sight of Mr. Gallon's red-topped roof at the four lane ends, from whose dumpy chimney the circling curl of a wood fire was just emerging upon the pure air. As she got nearer, the early-stirring Mr. Gallon himself crossed the road to the stable, attired in the baggy velveteen shooting-jacket of low, with the white cords and shining pork-butcher's top-boots of high life. Mr. Gallon was going to feed Tippy Tom before setting off for the great open champion coursing meeting to be held on Spankerley Downs, "by the kind permission of Sir Harry Fuzball, Baronet," it being one of the peculiar features of the day that gentlemen who object to having their game killed in detail, will submit to its going wholesale, provided it is done with a suitable panegyrick. "By the kind permission of Sir Harry Fuzball, Baronet," or "by leave of the lord of the manor of Flatshire," and so on; and thus every idler who can't keep himself is encouraged to keep a greyhound, to the detriment of a nice ladylike amusement, and the encouragement of gambling and poaching.

Mr. Gallon was to be field steward of this great open champion meeting, and had been up betimes, polishing off Tippy Tom; which having done, he next paid a similar compliment to his own person; and now again was going to feed the flash high-stepping screw, ere he commenced with his breakfast.

Mrs. Margerum's "*hie, Mr. Gallon, hie!*" and up-raised hand,

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as she hurried down the hill towards his house, arrested his progress as he passed to the stable with the sieve, and he now stood biting the oats, and eyeing her approach with the foreboding of mischief that so seldom deceives one.

“O Mr. Gallon! O Mr. Gallon!” cried Mrs. Margerum, tottering up, and dropping her feathered head on his brawny shoulder.

“*What's oop? What's oop?*” eagerly demanded our sportsman, fearing for his fair character.

“O Mr. Gallon! *such* mischief! *such* mischief!”

“Speak, woman! speak!” demanded our publican; “say, *has he cotched ye?*”

“Yes, Gerge, yes,” sobbed Mrs. Margerum, bursting into tears.

“The devil he has!” exclaimed Mr. Gallon, stamping furiously with his right foot, “Coom into it hoose, woman; coom into it hoose, and tell us arl aboot it.” So saying, forgetting Tippy Tom’s wants, he retraced his steps with the corn, and flung frantically into the kitchen of his little two-roomed cottage.

“Here, lassie!” cried he, to a little girl, who was frying a dish of bubble-and-squeak at the fire. “Here, lassie, set doon it pan loike, and tak this corn to it huss, and stand’ by while it eats it;” so saying he handed her the sieve, and following her to the door, closed it upon her.

“Noo,” said he to Mrs. Margerum, “sit doon an tell us arl aboot it. Who cotched ye? Nosey, or who?”

“O it wasn’t me! It was Anthony Thom they caught, and they used him shameful; but I’ll have him tried for his life afore my Lord Size, and transported, if it costs me all I’m worth in the world.”

“Anthony Thom, was it?” rejoined Mr. Gallon, raising his great eyebrows, and staring with his saucer eyes, “Anthony Thom, was it? but he’d ha’ nothin’ upon oi ‘ope?”

“Nothin’, Gerge,” replied Mrs. Margerum, “nothin—less now it might just ’appen to be an old rag of a night-cap of that nasty, covetous body Cuddy Flintoff; but whether it had a mark upon it or not I really can’t say.”

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"O dear, but that's a bad job," rejoined Mr. Gallon, biting his lips and shaking his great bull-head; "O dear, but that's a bad job. You know I always charged ye to be careful 'bout unlawful goods."

"You did, Gerge! you did!" sighed Mrs. Margerum; "and if this old rag had a mark, it was a clear oversight. But O dear!" continued she, bursting into tears, "how they did beat my Anthony Thom!" With this relief she became more composed, and proceeded to disclose all the particulars.

"Ah, this 'ill be a trick of those nasty pollis fellers," observed Mr. Gallon thoughtfully, "oi know'd they'd be the ruin o' trade as soon as ever they came into it country loike—nasty pokin', pryin', mischievous fellers. Hoosomiver it must be seen to, and that quickly," continued he, "for it would damage me desp'rate on the Torf to have ony disturbance o' this sort, and we mun stop it if we can. Here, lassie!" cried he to the little girl who had now returned from the stable, "lay cloth i' next room loike, and then finish the fryin'; and oi'll tell ye what," continued he, laying his huge hand on Mrs. Margerum's shoulder, "oi've got to go to it champion cooursin' meetin', so I'll just put it huss into harness and droive ye round by it Bird-i'-the-Bush, where we'll find Carroty Kebbel, who'll tell us what te do, for oi don't like the noight-cap business some how," so saying Mr. Gallon took his silver-plated harness down from its peg in the kitchen, and proceeded to caparison Tippy Tom, while the little girl, now assisted by Mrs. Margerum, prepared the breakfast, and set it on the table. Rather a sumptuous repast they had, considering it was only a way-side beer-shop; bubble-and-squeak, reindeer-tongue, potted game, potted shrimps, and tea strikingly like some of Sir Moses's. The whole being surmounted with a glass a-piece of pure British gin, Mr. Gallon finished his toilette, and then left to put the high-stepping screw into the light spring-cart, while Mrs. Margerum reviewed her visage in the glass, and as the open-works clock in the kitchen struck nine, they were dashing down the Heatherbell Road at the rate of twelve miles an hour.

ASK MAMMA.

CHAPTER XC.

MR. CARROTY KEBBEL.



R. CARROTY KEBBEL was a huge red-haired, Crimean-bearded, peripatetic attorney, who travelled from petty sessions to petty sessions, spending his intermediate time at the public-houses, ferreting out and getting up cases. He was a roistering ruffian, who contradicted everybody, denied everything, and tried to get rid of what he couldn't answer with a horse-laugh. He was in good practice, for he allowed the police a liberal per-centge for bringing him prosecutions, while his bellowing bullying insured him plenty of defences on his own account. He was retained by half the ragamuffins in the country. He had long been what Mr. Gallon not inaptly called his "liar," and had done him such good service as to earn free quarters at the Rose and Crown whenever he liked to call. He had been there only the day before, in the matter of an *alibi* he was getting up for our old hare-finding friend Springer, who was most unhandsomely accused of night-poaching in Lord Oil-cake's preserves, and that was how Mr. Gallon knew where to find him. The Crumpletin railway had opened out a fine consecutive line of petty sessions, out of which Carrots had carved a "home circuit" of his own. He was then on his return tour.

With the sprightly exertions of Tippy Tom, Gallon and Mrs. Margerum were soon within sight of the Bird-in-the-Bush Inn, at which Gallon drew up with a dash. Carrots, however, had left some half-hour before, taking the road for Farningford, where the petty sessions were about to be held; and though this

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was somewhat out of Gallon's way to Spankerley Downs, yet the urgency of the case determined him to press on in pursuit, and try to see Carrots. Tippy Tom, still full of running, went away again like a shot, and bowling through Kimberley toll-bar with the air of a man who was free, Gallon struck down the Rough-field road to the left, availing himself of the slight fall of the ground to make the cart run away with the horse, as it were, and so help him up the opposing hill. That risen, they then got upon level ground; and, after bowling along for a mile or so, were presently cheered with the sight of the black wide-awake crowned lawyer striding away in the distance.

Carrots was a disciple of the great Sir Charles Napier, who said that a change of linen, a bit of soap, and a comb were kit enough for any one; and being only a two-shirts-a-week man, he generally left his "other" one at such locality as he was likely to reach about the middle of it, so as to apportion the work equally between them. This was clean-shirt day with him, and he was displaying his linen in the ostentatious way of a man little accustomed to the luxury. With the exception of a lavender-and-white coloured watch-ribbon tie, he was dressed in a complete suit of black-grounded tweed, with the purple dots of an incipient rash, the coat having capacious outside pockets, and the trowsers being now turned up at the bottoms to avoid the mud; showing rhinoceros hide-like shoes covering most formidable looking feet. Such was the monster who was now swinging along the highway at the rate of five miles an hour, in the full vigour of manhood and the pride of the morning. At the sight of him in advance, Mr. Gallon just touched Tippy Tom with the point of the whip, which the animal resented with a dash at the collar and a shake of the head, that as good as said, " You'd better not do that again, master, unless you wish to take your vehicle home in a sack." Mr. Gallon therefore refrained, enlisting the aid of his voice instead, and after a series of those slangey-whiney *yaah-hoo! yaah-hoo!*'s that the swell stage-coachmen, as they called the Snobs, used to indulge in to clear the road or attract attention, Mr. Gallon broke out into a good downright "**HOLLOA, MR. KEBBEL! HOLLOA!**"

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At the sound of his name, Carrots, who was spouting his usual exculpatory speech, vowing he felt certain no bench of Justices would convict on such evidence, and so on, pulled up; and Mr. Gallon, waving his whip over his head, he faced about, and sat down on a milestone to await his coming. The vehicle was presently alongside of him.

"Holloa, George!" exclaimed Carrots, rising and shaking hands with his client. "Holloa! What's up? Who's this you've got?" looking intently at Mrs. Margerum.

"I'll tell you," said George, easing the now quivering-tailed Tippy Tom's head; "this is Mrs. Margerum you've heard me speak 'boot; and she's loike to get into a little trooble loike; and I tell'd her she'd best see a 'liar' as soon as she could."

"Just so," nodded Kebbel, anticipating what had happened.

"Ye see," continued Mr. Gallon, winding his whip thong round the stick as he spoke, "in picking up some little bit things in a hurry loike, she put up a noight cap, and she's not quoite sure whether she can stand by it or not, ye know."

"I see," assented Carrots; "and they've got it, I s'pose?"

"I don't know that they got it," now interposed Mrs. Margerum; "but they got my Anthony Thom, and beat him most shemful. Can't I have redress for my Anthony Thom?"

"We'll see," said Carrots, resuming his seat on the milestone, and proceeding to elicit all particulars, beginning with the usual important inquiry, whether Anthony Thom had said anything or not. Finding he had not, Carrots took courage, and seemed inclined to make light of the matter. "The groceries you bought, of course," said he, "of Roger Rounding the basket-man—Roger will swear anything for me; and as for the night-cap, why say it was your aunt's, or your niece's, or your sister's—Caroline Somebody's—Caroline Frazer's, Charlotte Friar's, anybody's whose initials are C. F."

"O! but it wasn't a woman's night-cap, sir, it was a man's; the sort of cap they hang folks in; and I should like to hang Old Mosey for beating my Anthony Thom," rejoined Mrs. Margerum.

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"I'm afraid we can't hang him for that," replied Mr. Kebbel, laughing. "Might have him up for the assault, perhaps."

"Well, have him up for the assault," rejoined Mrs. Margerum; "have him up for the assault. What business had he to beat my Anthony Thom?"

"Get him fined a shilling, and have to pay your own costs, perhaps," observed Mr. Kebbel; "better leave that alone, and stick to the parcel business—better stick to the parcel business. There are salient points in the case. The hour of the night is an awkward part," continued he, biting his nails; "not but that the thing is perfectly capable of explanation, only the Beaks don't like that sort of work, it won't do for us to provoke an inquiry into the matter."

"Just so," assented Mr. Gallon, who thought Mrs. Margerum had better be quiet.

"Well, but it's hard that my Anthony Thom's to be beat, and get no redress!" exclaimed Mrs. Margerum, bursting into tears.

"Hush, woman! hush!" muttered Mr. Gallon, giving her a dig in the ribs with his elbow; adding, "ye mun de what it liar tells ye."

"I'll tell you what I can do," continued Mr. Kebbel, after a pause. "They've got my old friend Mark Bull, the ex-Double-im-up-shire Super, into this force, and think him a great card. I'll get him to go to Sir Moses about the matter; and if Mark finds we are all right about the cap, he's the very man to put Mosey up to a prosecution, and then we shall make a rare harvest out of him," Carrots rubbing his hands with glee at the idea of an action for a malicious prosecution.

"Ay, that'll be the gam," said Mr. Gallon, chuckling,—"that'll be the gam; far better nor havin' of him oop for the 'sult."

"I think so," said Mr. Kebbel, "I think so; at all events I'll consider the matter; and if I send Mark to Sir Moses, I'll tell him to come round by your place and let you know what he does; but, in the meantime," continued Kebbel, rising and addressing Mrs. Margerum earnestly, "*don't you answer any questions* to anybody, and tell Anthony Thom to hold his tongue too, and I've no doubt Mr. Gallon and I'll make it all right;"

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so saying, Mr. Kebbel shook hands with them both, and stalked on to his petty sessional practice.

Gallon then coaxed Tippy Tom round, and, retracing his steps as far as Kimberley gate, paid the toll, and shot Mrs. Margerum out, telling her to make the best of her way back to the Rose and Crown, and stay there till he returned. Gallon then took the road to the right, leading on to the wide-extending Spankerley Downs; where, unharnessing Tippy Tom under lea of a secluded plantation, he produced a saddle and bridle from the back of the cart, which, putting on, he mounted the high-stepping white, and was presently among the coursers, the greatest man at the meeting, some of the yokels, indeed, taking him for Sir Harry Fuzball himself.

But when Mr. Mark Bull arrived at Sir Moses's, things had taken another turn, for the Baronet, in breaking open what he thought was one of Mrs. Margerum's boxes, had in reality got into Mr. Bankhead's, where, finding his ticket of leave, he was availing himself of that worthy's absence to look over the plate prior to dismissing him, and Sir Moses made so light of Anthony Thom's adventure that the Super had his trouble for nothing. Thus the heads of the house—*the* Mr. and Mrs. in fact, were cleared out in one and the same day, by no means an unusual occurrence in an establishment, after which of course Sir Moses was so inundated with stories against them, that he almost resolved to imitate his great predecessor's example and live at the Fox and Hounds Hotel at Hinton in future. To this place his mind was now more than ordinarily directed in consequence of the arrangements that were then making for the approaching Hunt Ball, to which long-looked-for festival we will now request the company of the reader.

ASK MAMMA.

CHAPTER XCI.

THE HUNT BALL



Cupid and Co.

HE Hit-im and Hold-im shire hunt balls had long been celebrated for their matrimonial properties, as well for settling ripe flirtations, as for bringing to a close the billing and cooing of unproductive love, and

opening fresh accounts with the popular firm of "Cupid and Co." They were the greenest spot on the memory's waste of many, on the minds of some whose recollections carried them back to the romping, vigorous Sir Roger de Coverley dances of Mr. Customer's time,—of many who remembered the more stately glide of the elegant quadrille of Lord Martingal's reign, down to the introduction of the once scandalising waltz and polka of our own. Many "Ask Mamma's" had been elicited by these balls, and good luck was said to attend all their unions.

ASK MAMMA.

Great had been the changes in the manners and customs of the country, but the one dominant plain gold ring idea remained fixed and immutable. The Hit-im and Hold-im shire hunt ball was expected to furnish a great demand for these, and Garnett the silversmith always exhibited an elegant white satin-lined morocco case full in his window, in juxtaposition with rows of the bright dress-buttons of the hunt, glittering on beds of delicate rose-tinted tissue paper.

All the milliners far and wide used to advertise their London and Parisian finery for the occasion, like our friend Mrs. Bobbinette,—for the railway had broken through the once comfortable monopoly that Mrs. Russelton and the Hinton ones formerly enjoyed, and had thrown crinoline providing upon the country at large. Indeed, the railway had deranged the old order of things; for whereas in former times a Doubleimupshire or a Neck-and-Crop shire sportsman was rarely to be seen at the balls, and those most likely under pressure of most urgent “Ask Mamma” circumstances, now they came swarming down like swallows, consuming a most unreasonable quantity of Champagne—always, of course, returning and declaring it was all “gusberry.” Formerly the ball was given out of the Hit-im and Hold-im shire hunt funds; but this unwonted accession so increased the expense, that Sir Moses couldn’t stand it, dom’d if he could; and he caused a rule to be passed, declaring that after a certain sum allowed by the club, the rest should be paid by a tax on the tickets, so that the guest-inviting members might pay for their friends. In addition to this, a sliding-scale of Champagne was adopted, beginning with good, and gradually relaxing in quality, until there is no saying but that some of the late sitters might get a little gooseberry. Being, however, only a guest, we ought not perhaps to be too critical in the matter, so we will pass on to the more general features of the entertainment.

We take it a woman’s feelings and a man’s feelings with regard to a ball are totally different and distinct. A woman looks upon a ball as a sort of second heaven, a man regards it merely as a place to pass an idle hour: a woman thinks all her

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conquests are made in a ball-room ; men best know how few have been captured by anything they ever saw there. Women think because their own sex laud and admire their gorgeous overlaid dresses, that they have the same effect on the men. Never was a greater mistake. Men—unmarried men, at least —know nothing of the intrinsic value of a dress ; they look at the general effect on the figure. Piquant simplicity, something that the mind grasps at a glance and retains—such as Miss Yammerton's dress in the glove scene—is what they like. Many ladies, indeed, seem to get costly dresses in order to cover them over with something else, just as gentlemen build handsome lodges to their gates, and then block them out of sight by walls.

But even if ball-dresses were as attractive to the gentlemen as the ladies seem to think them, they must remember the competition they have to undergo in a ball-room, where great home beauties may be suddenly eclipsed by unexpected rivals, and young gentlemen see that there are other angels in the world besides their own adored ones. Still balls are balls, and fashion is fashion, and ladies must conform to it, or what could induce them to introduce the bits of black of the present day into their coloured dresses, as if they were just emerging from mourning. Even our fair friends at Yammerton Grange conformed to the fashion, and edged the many pink satin-ribboned flounces of their white tulle dresses with narrow black lace—though they would have looked much prettier without.

Of all the balls given by the members of the Hit-im and Hold-im shire hunt, none had perhaps excited greater interest than the one about to take place, not only on account of its own intrinsic merits as a ball, but because of the many tender emotions waiting for solutions on that eventful evening. Among others it may be mentioned that our fat friend the Woolpack had confided to Mrs. Rocket Larkspur, who kept a sort of register-office for sighers, his admiration of the fair auburn-haired Flora Yammerton ; and Mrs. Rocket having duly communicated the interesting fact to the young lady, intimating, of course, that he would have the usual “ten thousand a year,”

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Flora had taken counsel with herself whether she had not better secure him, than contend with her elder sister either for Sir Moses or Mr. Pringle, especially as she did not much fancy Sir Moses, and Billy was very wavering in his attentions, sometimes looking extremely sweet at her, sometimes equally so at Clara, and at other times even smiling on that little childish minx Harriet. Indeed, Mrs. Rocket Larkspur, in the multiplicity of her meddling, had got a sort of half-admission from that young owl, Rowley Abingdon, that he thought Harriet very pretty, and she felt inclined to fan the flame of that speculation too.

Then Miss Fairey, of Yarrow Court, was coming, and it was reported that Miss de Glancey had applied for a ticket, in order to try and cut her out with the elegant Captain Languisher, of the Royal Hollyhock Hussars. Altogether it was expected to be a capital ball, both for dancers and lookers-on.

People whose being's end and aim is gaiety, as they call converting night into day, in rolling from party to party, with all the means and appliances of London, can have little idea of the up-hill work it is in the country, getting together the ingredients of a great ball. The writing for rooms, the fighting for rooms—the bespeaking of horses, the not getting horses—the catching the train, the losing the train—above all, the choosing and ordering those tremendous dresses, with the dread of not getting those tremendous dresses, of their being carried by in the train, or not fitting when they come. Nothing but the indomitable love of a ball, as deeply implanted in a woman's heart as the love of a hunt is in that of a man, can account for the trouble and vexation they undergo.

But if 'tis a toil to the guests, what must it be to the givers, with no friendly Grange or Gunter at hand to supply everything, guests included, if required, at so much per head! Youth, glorious youth, comes to the aid, and enters upon the labour with all the alacrity that perhaps distinguished their fathers.

Let us now suppose the absorbing evening come; and that all-important element in country festivities, the moon shining with silvery clearness as well on the railway gliders as on the

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more patient plodders by the road. What a converging there was upon the generally quiet town of Hinton; reminding the older inhabitants of the best days of Lord Martingal and Mr. Customer's reigns. What a gathering up there was of shining satins and rustling silks and moire antiques, white, pink, blue, yellow, green, to say nothing of clouds of tulle; what a compression of swelling eider-down and watch-spring petticoats; and what a bolt-upright sitting of that happy pride which knows no pain, as party after party took up and proceeded to the scene of hopes and fears at the Fox and Hounds Hotel and Posting House.

The ball-room was formed of the entire suite of first-floor front apartments, which, on ordinary occasions, did duty as private rooms—private at least, as far as thin deal partitions could make them so—and the supper was laid out in our old acquaintance the club-room, connected by a sort of Isthmus of Suez, with a couple of diminutive steps towards the end to shoot the incautious becomingly, headforemost, into the room.

Carriages set down under the arched doorway, and a little along the passage the Blenheim was converted into a cloak-room for the ladies, where the voluminous dresses were shook out, and the last hurried glances snatched amid anxious groups of jostling arrivals. Gentlemen then emerging from the commercial room rejoined their fair friends in the passage, and were entrusted with fans and flowers while, with both hands, they steered their balloon-like dresses up the red druggetted staircase.

Gentlemen's balls have the advantage over those given by ladies, inasmuch as the gentlemen must be there early to receive their fair guests; and as a ball can always begin as soon as there are plenty of gentlemen, there are not those tedious delays and gatherings of nothing but crinoline that would only please Mr. Spurgeon.

The large, highly-glazed, gilt-lettered, yellow card of invitation, intimated nine o'clock as the hour; by which time most of the Hinton people were ready, and all the outlying ones were fast drawing towards the town. Indeed, there was



THE CLOAK ROOM FOR THE LADIES.

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nothing to interfere with the dancing festivities, for dinner given on a ball night is not popular with the ladies—enough for the evening being the dance thereof. Country ladies are not like London ones, who can take a dinner, an opera, two balls, and an at-home in one and the same night. As to the Hinton gentlemen, they were very hospitable so long as nobody wanted anything from them; if they did, they might whistle a long time before they got it. If, for instance, that keeper of a house of call for Bores, Paul Straddler, saw a mud-sparked man with a riding-whip in his hand, hurrying about the town, he would after him, and press him to dine off, perhaps, “crimped cod and oyster sauce, and a leg of four year old mutton, with a dish of mince pies or woodcocks, whichever he preferred;” but on a ball night, when it would be a real convenience to a man to have a billet, Paul never thought of asking any one, though when he met his friends in the ball, and heard they had been uncomfortable at the Sun or the Fleece, he would exclaim, with well-feigned reproach, “O dash it, man, why didn’t you come to me?”

But let us away to the Fox and Hounds and see what is going on.

To see the repugnance people have to being early at a ball, one would wonder how dancing ever gets begun. Yet somebody must get there first, though we question whether any of our fair readers ever performed the feat; at all events, if they ever did, we will undertake to say they have taken very good care not to repeat the performance.

The Blurkinses were the first to arrive on this occasion, having only themselves to think about, and being anxious, as they said, to see as much as they could for their money. Then having been duly received by Sir Moses and the gallant circle of fox hunters, and passed inwardly, they took up a position, so as to be able to waylay those who came after with their coarse compliments, beginning with Mrs. Dotherington, who, Blurkins declared, had worn the grey silk dress she then had on ever since he knew her.

Jimmy Jarperson, the Laughing Hyæna, next came under

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his notice, Blurkins telling him that his voice grated on his ear like a file ; asking if anybody else had ever told him so.

Mrs. Rocket Larkspur, who was duly distended in flaming red satin, was told she was like a full-blown peony ; and young Treadcroft was asked if he knew that people called him the Woolpack. Meanwhile Mrs. Blurkins kept pinching and feeling the ladies' dresses as they passed, making a mental estimate of their cost. She told Miss Yammerton she had spoilt her dress by the black lace.

A continuously ascending stream of crinoline at length so inundated the room, that by ten o'clock Sir Moses thought it was time to open the ball ; so deputing Tommy Heslop to do the further honours at the door, he sought Lady Fuzball, and claimed the favour of her hand for the first quadrille.

This was the signal for the unmated ones to pair ; and forthwith there was such a drawing on of gloves, such a feeling of ties, such a rising on tip-toes, and straining of eyes, and running about, asking for Miss This, and Miss That, and if anybody had seen anything of Mrs. So-and-so.

At length the sought ones were found, anxiety abated, and the glad couples having secured suitable *vis-à-vis*, proceeded to take up positions.

At a flourish of the leader's bâton, the enlivening "La Traviata" struck up, and away the red coats and black coats went sailing and sinking, and rising and jumping, and twirling with the lightly-floating dresses of the ladies.

The "Pelissier Galop" quickly followed, then the "Ask Mamma Polka," and just as the music ceased, and the now slightly-flushed couples were preparing for a small-talk promenade, a movement took place near the door, and the elegant swan-like de Glancey was seen sailing into the room with her scarlet-geranium-festooned dress set off with eight hundred yards of tulle ! Taking her chaperone Mrs. Roseworth's arm, she came sailing majestically along, the men all alive for a smile, the ladies laughing at what they called her preposterous dimensions.

But de Glancey was not going to defeat her object by any

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premature condescension ; so she just met the men's raptures with the slightest recognition of her downcast eyes, until she encountered the gallant Captain Languisher with lovely Miss Fairey on his arm, when she gave him one of her most captivating smiles, thinking to have him away from Miss Fairey in no time.

But Miss de Glancey was too late ! The Captain had just "popped the question," and was then actually on his way to "Ask Mamma," and so returned her greeting with an air of cordial indifference, that as good as said, "Ah, my dear, you'll not do for me."

Miss de Glancey was shocked. It was the first time in her life that she had ever missed her aim. Nor was her mortification diminished by the cool way our hero, Mr. Pringle, next met her advances. She had been so accustomed to admiration, that she could ill brook the want of it, and the double blow was too much for her delicate sensibilities. She felt faint, and as soon as she could get a fly large enough to hold herself and her chaperone, she withdrew, the mortification of this evening far more than counterbalancing all the previous triumphs of her life.

One person more or less at a ball, however, is neither here nor there, and the music presently struck up again, and the whirling was resumed, just as if there was no such person as Miss de Glancey in existence. And thus waltz succeeded polka, and polka succeeded quadrille, with lively rapidity—everyone declaring it was a most delightful ball, and wondering when supper would be.

At length there was a lull, and certain unmistakeable symptoms announced that the hour for that superfluous but much talked of meal had arrived, whereupon there was the usual sorting of consequence to draw to the cross table at the top of the room, with the pairing off of eligible couples who could be trusted alone, and the shirking of Mammas by those who were not equally fortunate. Presently a movement was made towards the Isthmus of Suez, on reaching which the rotund ladies had to abandon their escorts to pilot their petticoats through the straits amid the cries of "take care of the steps!" "mind the steps at the end!" from those who knew the



The Hunt Ball - "stoh' Mamma" Potka

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dangers of the passage. And thus the crinoline came circling into the supper room—each lady again expanding with the increased space, and reclaiming her beau. Supper being, as we said before, a superfluous meal, it should be light and airy, something to please the eye and tempt the appetite; not composed of great solid joints that look like a farmer's ordinary, or a rent-day dinner, with “night mare” depicted on every dish. The Hit-im and Hold-im shire hunt balls had always been famous for the elegance of their supper, Lord Ladythorne kindly allowing his Italian confectioner, Signior Massaniello, to superintend the elegancies, that excited such admiration from the ladies as they worked their ways or wedged themselves in at the tables, but whose beauty did not save them from destruction as the evening advanced. At first of course the solids were untouched, the tongues, the hams, the chickens, the turkeys, the lobster salads, the nests of plover eggs, the clatter patter being relieved by a heavy salvo of Champagne artillery. Brisk was the demand for it at starting, for the economical arrangement was as well known as if it had been placarded about the room. When the storm of corks had subsided and clean plates been supplied, the sweets, the jellies, the confectionery were attacked, and occasional sly sorties were made against the flower sugar vases and ornaments of the table. Then perspiring waiters came panting in with more Champagne fresh out of the ice, and again arm-extended the glasses hailed its coming, though some of the Neck-and-Cropshire gentlemen smacked their lips after drinking it, and pronounced it to be No. 2. Nevertheless they took some more when it came round again. At length the most voracious cor-morant was appeased, and all eyes gradually turned towards the sporting president in the centre of the cross table.

We have heard it said that the House of Commons is the most appalling and critical assembly in the world to address, but we confess we think a mixed party of ladies and gentlemen at a sit-down supper a more formidable audience.

We don't know anything more painful than to hear a tongue-tied country gentleman floundering for words and scrambling

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after an idea that the quick-witted ladies have caught long before he comes within sight of his subject. Theirs is like the sudden dart of the elastic greyhound compared to the solemn towl of the old slow-moving "southern" hound after its game.

Sir Moses, however, as our readers know, was not one of the tongue-tied sort—on the contrary, he had a great flow of words and could palaver the ladies as well as the gentlemen. Indeed he was quite at home in that room where he had coaxed and wheedled subscriptions, promised wonders, and given away horses without the donees incurring any "obligation." Accordingly at the fitting time he rose from his throne, and with one stroke of his hammer quelled the remaining conversation which had been gradually dying out in anticipation of what was coming. He then called for a bumper toast, and after alluding in felicitous terms to the happy event that so aroused the "symphonies" of old Wotherspoon, he concluded by proposing the health of her Majesty the Queen, which of course was drank with three times three and one cheer more. The next toast, of course, was the ladies who had honoured the ball with their presence, and certainly if ever ladies ought to be satisfied with the compliments paid them, it was on the present occasion, for Sir Moses vowed and protested that of all beauties the Hit-im and Hold-im shire beauties were the fairest, the brightest, and the best; and he said it would be a downright reflection upon the rising generation if they did not follow the Crown Prince of Prussia's excellent example, and make that ball to be the most blissful and joyous of their recollections. This toast being heartily responded to, Sir Moses leading the cheers, Sir Harry Fuzball rose to return thanks on behalf of the ladies, any one of whom could have done it a great deal better; after which old Sir George Persiflage, having arranged his lace-tipped tie, proposed the health of Sir Moses, and spoke of him in very different terms to what Sir Moses did of Sir George at the hunt dinner, and this answer affording Sir Moses another opportunity—the good Champagne being exhausted—he renewed his former advice, and concluded by moving an adjournment to the ball-room. Then the weight of oratory being off, the school



"THE BARONET WAS BOOKED."

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broke loose as it were, and all parties paired off as they liked. Many were the trips at the steps as they returned by the narrow passage to the ball-room. The "Ask Mamma" Polka then appropriately struck up, but polking being rather beyond our Baronet's powers he stood outside the ring rubbing his nose and eyeing the gay twirlers, taking counsel within himself what he should do. The state of his household had sorely perplexed him, and he had about come to the resolution that he must either marry again or give up housekeeping and live at Hinton. Then came the question whom he should take? Now Mrs. Yammerton was a noted good manager, and in the infernal sort of way that we all sometimes deceive ourselves, he came to the conclusion that her daughters would be the same. Clara was very pretty—dom'd if she wasn't—she would look very well at the head of his table, and just at the moment she came twirling past with Billy Pringle, the pearl loops of her pretty pink wreath dancing on her fair forehead. The Baronet was booked; "he would have her, dom'd if he wouldn't," and taking courage within himself as the music ceased, he claimed her hand for the next quadrille, and leading her to the top of the dance, commenced joking her about Billy, who he said would make a very pretty girl, and then commenced praising herself. He admired her and everything she had on, from the wreath to her ribbon, and was so affectionate that she felt if he wasn't a little elevated she would very soon have an offer. Then Mammas, and Mrs. Rocket Larkspurs, and Mrs. Dotherington, and Mrs. Impelow, and many other quick-eyed ladies followed their movements, each thinking that they saw by the sparkle of Clara's eye, and the slight flush of her pretty face, what was going on. But they were premature. Sir Moses did not offer until he had mopped his brow in the promenade, when, on making the second slow round of the room, a significant glance with a slight inclination of her handsome head as she passed her Mamma announced that she was going to be Lady Mainchance! Hoo-ray for the Hunt Ball!

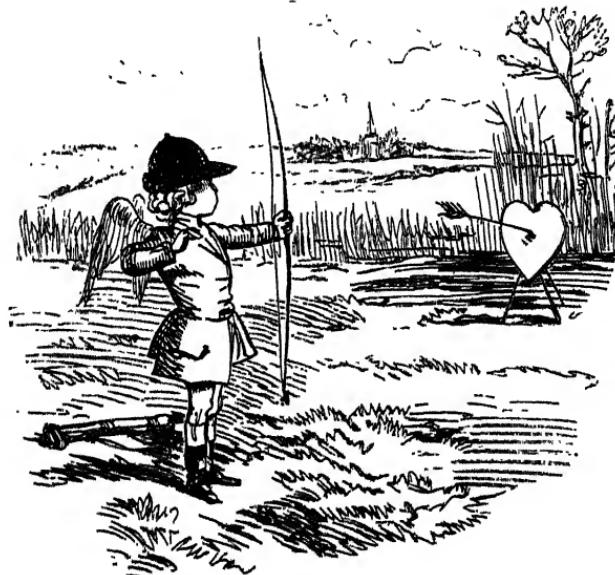
Sold again and the money paid! as the trinket-sellers say at a fair. Another offer and accepted say we. Captain and Mrs.

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Languisher, Sir Moses and Lady Mainchance. Who wouldn't go to a Hit-im and Hold-im shire hunt ball?

Then when the music struck up again, instead of fulfilling her engagements with her next partner, Clara begged to be excused—had got a little headache, and went and sat down between her Mamma and her admiring intended; upon which the smouldering fire of surmise broke out into downright assertion, and it ran through the room that Sir Moses had offered to Miss Yammerton. Then the indignant Mammas rose hastily from their seats and paraded slowly past to see how the couple looked, pitying the poor creature, and young gentlemen joked with each other, saying—"Go thou and do likewise," and paired off to the supper-room to acquire courage from the well-iced but inferior Champagne.

And so the ardent ball progressed, some laying the foundations for future offers, some advancing their suits a step, others bringing them to, we hope, a happy termination. Never was a more productive hunt ball known, and it was calculated that the little gentleman who rides so complacently on our first page exhausted all his arrows on the occasion.



The "Little Gentleman."

ASK MAMMA.

CHAPTER XCII.

MISS DE GLANCEY'S REFLECTIONS.



HEN the mortified Miss de Glancey returned to her lodgings at Mrs. Sarsnet the milliner's, in Verbena Crescent, she bid Mrs. Roseworth good night, and, dismissing her little French maid to bed, proceeded to her own apartment, where, with the united aid of a chamber and two toilette-table candles, she instituted a most rigid examination, as well of her features as her figure, in her own hand-mirror and the various glasses of the room, and satisfied herself that neither her looks nor her dress were any way in fault for the indifference with which she had been received. Indeed, though she might perhaps be a little partial, she thought she never saw herself looking better, and certainly her dress was as stylish and looming as any in the ball-room.

Those points being satisfactorily settled, she next unclasped the single row of large pearls that fastened the bunch of scarlet geraniums into her silken brown hair; and taking them off her exquisitely modelled head, laid them beside her massive scarlet geranium bouquet and delicate kid gloves upon the toilette-table. She then stirred the fire; and wheeling the easy-chair round to the front of it, took the eight hundred yards of tulle deliberately in either hand and sunk despondingly into the depths of the chair, with its ample folds before her. Drawing her dress up a little in front, she placed her taper white-satined feet on the low green fender, and burying her beautiful face in her lace-fringed kerchief, proceeded to take an undisturbed

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examination of what had occurred. How was it that she, in the full bloom of her beauty and the zenith of her experience, had failed in accomplishing what she used so easily to perform? How was it that Captain Languisher seemed so cool, and that supercilious Miss eyed her with a sidelong stare, that left its troubled mark behind, like the ripple of the water after a boat? And that boy Pringle, too, who ought to have been proud and flattered by her notice, instead of grinning about with those common country Misses? All this hurt and distressed our accomplished coquette, who was unused to indifference and mortification. Then from the present her mind reverted to the past; and stirring the fire, she recalled the glorious recollections of her many triumphs, beginning with her school-girl days, when the yeomanry officers used to smile at her as they met the girls out walking, until Miss Whippey restricted them to the garden during the eight days that the dangerous danglers were on duty. Next, how the triumph of her first offer was enhanced by the fact that she got her old opponent Sarah Snowball's lover from her—who, however, she quickly discarded for Captain Capers—who in turn yielded to Major Spankley. Then she thought how she kept the rich Mr. Acres, the gay Mr. Dicer, and the grave Mr. Woodhouse all in tow together, each thinking himself the happy man and the others the cat's paw, until the rash Hotspur Smith exploded amongst them, and then suddenly dwindled from a millionaire into a mouse. Other names quickly followed, recalling the recollections of a successful career. At last she came to that dread, that fatal day, when, having exterminated Imperial John, and with the Peer well in hand, she was induced, much against her better judgment, to continue the chase, and lose all chance of becoming a Countess. Oh, what a day was that! She had long watched the noble Earl's increasing fervour, and marked his admiring eye, as she sat in the glow of beauty and the pride of equestrianism; and she felt quite sure, if the chase had ended at the check caused by the cattle-drover's dog he would have married her. Oh, that the run should ever have continued! Oh, that she should ever have been lured on to

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her certain destruction ! Why didn't she leave well alone ? And at the recollection of that sad, that watery day, she burst into tears and sobbed convulsively. Her feelings being thus relieved, and the fire about exhausted, she then got out of her crinoline and under the counterpane.

ASK MAMMA.

CHAPTER XCIII.

LOVE AT SECOND SIGHT.



SUDDEN change now came over the country.—The weather, which had been mild and summer-like throughout, changed to frost, binding all nature up in a few hours. The holes in the streets which were shining with water in the gas-lights when Miss de Glancey retired to bed, had a dull black-leaded sort of look in the morning, while the windows of her room glistened with the silvery spray of ferns and heaths and fancy flowers.—The air was sharp and bright, with a clear blue sky overhead, all symptomatic of frost, with every appearance of continuing.—That, however, is more a gentleman's question than a lady's, so we will return within doors.

Flys being scarce at Hinton, and Miss de Glancey wishing to avoid the gape and stare of a country town, determined to return by the 11.30 train; so arose after a restless night, and taking a hurried breakfast, proceeded, with the aid of her maid, to make one of those exquisite toilettes for which she had so long been justly famous. Her sylph-like figure was set off in a bright green terry-velvet dress, with a green-feathered bonnet of the same colour and material, trimmed with bright scarlet ribbons, and a wreath of scarlet flowers inside. A snow-white ermine tippet, with ermine cuffs and muff, completed her costume. Having surveyed herself in every mirror, she felt extremely satisfied, and only wished Captain Languisher could see her. With that exact punctuality which constant practice engenders, but which sometimes keeps strangers sadly on the

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fret, the useful fly was at length at the door, and the huge box containing the eight hundred yards of tulle being hoisted on to the iron-railed roof, the other articles were huddled away, and Miss de Glancey ascending the steps, usurped the seat of honour, leaving Mrs. Roseworth and her maid to sit opposite to her. A smile with a half-bow to Mrs. Sarsnet, as she now stood at the door, with a cut of the whip from the coachman, sent our party liltting and tilting over the hard surface of the road to the rail.

The line ran true and smooth this day, and the snorting train stopped at the pretty Swiss cottage station at Fairfield just as Mrs. Roseworth saw the last of the parcels out of the fly, while Miss de Glancey took a furtive peep at the passengers from an angle of the bay window, at which she thought she herself could not be seen.

Now, it so happened that the train was in charge of the well-known Billy Bates, a smart young fellow, whose good looks had sadly stood in the way of his preferment, for he never could settle to anything; and after having been a footman, a whipper-in, a watcher, a groom, and a grocer, he had now taken up with the rail, where he was a great favourite with the fair, whom he rather prided himself upon pairing with what he considered appropriate partners. Seeing our lovely coquette peeping out, it immediately occurred to him that he had a suitable *vis-à-vis* for her—a dashing looking gent, in a red flannel Emperor shirt, a blue satin cravat, a buff vest, and a new bright-green cut-away with fancy buttons; altogether a sort of swell that isn't to be seen every day.

“This way, ladies!” now cried Billy, hurrying into the first-class waiting-room, adjusting the patent leather pouch-belt of his smart green-and-red uniform as he spoke. “This way ladies, please!” waving them on with his clean white doe-skin-gloved hand towards the door; whereupon Miss de Glancey, drawing herself up, and primming her features, advanced on to the platform, like the star of the evening coming on to the stage of a theatre.

Billy then opened the frosty-windowed door of a carriage a

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few paces up the line; whereupon a red railway wrapper-rug with brown foxes' heads being withdrawn, a pair of Bedford-corded legs dropped from the opposite seat, and a dog-skin-gloved hand was protruded to assist the ascent of the enterer. A pretty taper-fingered primrose-kidded one was presently inside it; but ere the second step was accomplished, a convulsive thrill was felt, and, looking up, Miss de Glancey found herslf in the grasp of her old friend Imperial John!

"O Mr. Hybrid!" exclaimed she, shaking his still retained hand with the greatest cordiality; "O Mr. Hybrid! I'm so glad to see you! I'm so glad to meet somebody I know!" and gathering herself together, she entered the carriage, and sat down opposite him.

Mrs. Roseworth then following, afforded astonished John a moment to collect his scattered faculties, yet not sufficient time to compare the dread, "*Si-r-r-r!* do you *mean to insult me!*?" of their former meeting, with the cordial greeting of this. Indeed, our fair friend felt that she had a great arrear of politeness to make up, and as railway time is short, she immediately began to ply her arts by inquiring most kindly after His Highness's sister Mrs. Poppeyfield and her baby, who she heard was *such* a sweet boy; and went on so affably, that before Billy Bates arrived with the tickets, which Mrs. Roseworth had forgotten to take, Imperial John began to think that there must have been some mistake before, and Miss de Glancey couldn't have understood him. Then, when the train was again in motion, she applied the artillery of her eyes so well—for she was as great an adept in her art as the Northumberland horse-tamer is in his—that ere they stopped at the Lanecroft station, she had again subjugated Imperial John;—taken his Imperial reason prisoner! Nay more, though he was going to Bowerbank to look at a bull, she actually persuaded him to alight and accompany her to Mrs. Roseworth's, where we need scarcely say he was presently secured, and in less than a week she had him so tame that she could lead him about anywhere.

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CHAPTER XCIV.

CUPID'S SETTLING DAY.



HE day after the ball was always a busy one in Hit-im and Hold-im shire. It was a sort of settling day, only the parties scattered about the country instead of congregating at the "corner." Those who had made up their minds overnight, came to "Ask Mamma" in the morning, and those who had not mustered sufficient courage, tried what a visit to inquire how the young lady was after the fatigue of the ball would do to assist them. Those who had got so far on the road as to have asked both the young lady and "Mamma," then got handed over to the more business-like inquiries of Papa—when Cupid oft "spreads his light wings and in a moment flies." Then it is that the terrible money exaggerations come out—the great expectations dwindling away and the thousands a-year becoming hundreds. We never knew a reputed Richest Commoner's fortune that didn't collapse most grievously under the "what have you got, and what will you do?" operation. But if it passes Papa, the still more dread ordeal of the lawyer has to be encountered, when one being summoned on either side, a hard money-driving bargain ensues, one trying how much he can get, the other how little he can give—until the whole nature and character of the thing is changed. Money! money! money! is the cry, as if there was nothing in the world worth living for but those eternal bits of yellow coin. But we are getting in advance of our subject, our suitor not having passed the lower, or Ask-Mamma house.

Among the many visited on this auspicious day were our

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fair friends at Yammerton Grange, our Richest Commoner having infused a considerable degree of activity into the matrimonial market. There is nothing like a little competition for putting young gentlemen on the alert. First to arrive was our friend Sir Moses Mainchance, who dashed up to the door in his gig with the air of a man on safe ground, saluting Mamma, whom he found alone in the drawing-room, and then the young ladies as they severally entered in succession. Having thus sealed and delivered himself into the family, as it were, he enlarged on the delights of the ball—the charming scene, the delightful music, the excellent dancing, the sudden disappearance of de Glancey and other the incidents of the evening. These topics being duly discussed, and cake and wine produced, "Mamma" presently withdrew, her example being followed at intervals by Flora and Harriet.

Scarcely had she got clear of the door ere the vehement bark of the terrier called her attention to the front of the house, where she saw our fat friend the Woolpack tit-tup-ing on the identical horse Jack Rogers so unceremoniously appropriated on the Crooked Billet day. There was young Treadcroft with his green-liveried cockaded groom behind him, trying to look as unconcerned as possible, though in reality he was in as great a fright as it was well possible for a boy to be. Having dismounted and nearly pulled the bell out of its socket with nervousness, he gave his horse to the groom with orders to wait, and then followed the footman into the dining-room, whither Mrs. Yammerton had desired him to be shown.

Now the Woolpack and the young Owl (Rowley Abingdon) had been very attentive both to Flora and Harriet at the ball, the Woolpack having twice had an offer on the tip of his tongue for Flora, without being able to get it off. Somehow his tongue clave to his lips—he felt as if his mouth was full of claggum. He now came to see if he could have any better luck at the Grange.

Mrs. Yammerton had read his feelings at the ball, and not receiving the expected announcement from Flora, saw that he wanted a little of her assistance, so now proceeded to give

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it. After a most cordial greeting and interchanges of the usual nothings of society, she took a glance at the ball, and then claimed his congratulations on Clara's engagement, which of course led up to the subject, opening the locked jaw at once ; and Mamma, having assured the fat youth of her perfect approval and high opinion of his character, very soon arranged matters between them, and produced Flora to confirm her. So she gained two sons-in-law in one night. Miss Harriet thus left alone, took her situation rather to heart, and fine Billy, forgetful of his Mamma's repeated injunctions and urgent entreaties to him to return now that the ball was over, and the hunting was stopped by the frost, telling him she wanted him on most urgent and particular business, was tender-hearted enough on finding Harriet in tears the next day to offer to console her with his hand, which we need not say she joyfully accepted, no lady liking to emulate "the last rose of summer and be left blooming alone." So all the pretty sisters were suited, Harriet perhaps the best off, as far as looks at least went.

But, when in due course the old "what have you got and what will you do ?" inquiries came to be instituted, we are sorry to say our fine friend could not answer them nearly so satisfactorily as the Woolpack, who had his balance-sheets nearly off by heart. Billy replying in the vacant *négligé* sort of way young gentlemen do, that he supposed he would have four or five thousand a-year, though when asked why he thought he'd have four or five thousand a-year, he really could not tell the reason why. Then, when further probed by our persevering Major, he admitted that it was all at the mercy of uncle Jerry, and that his Mamma had said their lawyer had told her he did not think pious Jerry would account except under pressure of the Court of Chancery, whereupon the Major's chin dropped, as many a man's chin has dropped at the dread announcement. It sounds like an antidote to matrimony. Even Mrs. Yammerton thought under the circumstances that the young Owl might be a safer speculation than fine Billy, though she rather leant to fine Billy, as people do lean to strangers in preference to those they know all about. Still Chancery was a choker. Equity is to the legal

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world what Newmarket is to the racing world, the unadulterated essence of the thing. As at Newmarket there is none of the fun and gaiety of the great race-meetings, so in Chancery there is none of the pomp and glitter and varied incident that rivets so many audiences to the law courts.

All is dull, solemn, and dry—paper, paper, paper—a redundancy of paper, as if it were possible to transfer the blush of perjury to paper. Fifty people will make affidavits for one that will go into a witness-box and have the truth twisted out of them by cross-examination. The few strangers who pop into court pop out again as quickly as they can, a striking contrast to those who go in in search of their rights—though wrestling for one's rights under a pressure of paper, is very like swimming for one's life enveloped in a salmon net. It is juries that give vitality to the administration of justice. A drowsy hum pervades the bar, well calculated for setting restless children to sleep, save when some such brawling buffoon as the Indian juggler gets up to pervert facts and address arguments to an educated judge that would be an insult to the mind of a petty juryman. One wonders at men calling themselves gentlemen demeaning themselves by such practices. Well did the noble-hearted Sir William Erle declare that the licence of the bar was such that he often wished the offenders could be prosecuted for a misdemeanour. We know an author who made an affidavit in a chancery suit equal in length to a three-volume novel, and what with weighing every word in expectation of undergoing some of the polished razors keen of that drowsy bar, he could not write fiction again for a twelvemonth. As it was, he underwent that elegant extract Mr. Verde, whose sponsors have done him such justice in the vulgar tongue, and because he made an immaterial mistake he was held up to the Court as utterly unworthy of belief! We wonder whether Mr. Verde's character or the deponent's suffered most by the performance. But enough of such worthies. Let all the bullies of the bar bear in mind if they have tongues other people have pens, and that consideration for the feelings of others is one of the distinguishing characteristics of gentlemen.

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CHAPTER XCV.

A STARTLING ANNOUNCEMENT



Something in the Paper.

HE proverbial serenity of Boodles was disturbed one dull winter afternoon by our old friend General Binks banging down the newly-arrived evening paper with a vehemence rarely witnessed in that quiet quarter. Mr. Dorfold, who was dozing as usual with outstretched legs before the fire, started up, thinking the General was dying. Major Mustard's hat dropped off, Mr. Proser let fall the "Times Supplement," Mr. Crowsfoot ceased conning the "Post," Ale-

mouth, the footman, stood aghast, and altogether there was a general cessation of everything—Boodles was paralyzed.

The General quickly followed up the blow with a tremendous oath, and seizing Colonel Callender's old beaver hat instead of his own new silk one, flung frantically out of the room, through the passage, and into St. James's Street as if bent on immediate destruction.

All was amazement! What's happened the General? Something must have gone wrong with the General! The General—the calmest, the quietest, the most placid man in

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the world—suddenly convulsed with such a violent paroxysm. He who had neither chick nor child, nor anything to care about, with the certainty of an Earldom, what *could* have come over him?

“I’ll tell you,” exclaimed Mr. Bullion, who had just dropped in on his way from the City; “I’ll tell you,” repeated he, taking up the paper which the General had thrown down, “*His banker’s failed!* Heard some queerish hints, as I came down Cornhill;” and forthwith Bullion turned to the City article, and ran his accustomed eye down its contents.

“Funds opened heavily. Foreign Stocks quiet. About £20,000 in bar gold. The John Brown arrived from China, Departure of the Peninsular Mail postponed,” and so on; but neither failures, nor rumours of failures, either of bankers or others, were there.

Very odd—what could it be, then? must be something in the paper. And again the members resolved themselves into a committee of the whole house to ascertain what it was.

The first place that a lady would look to for the solution of a mystery of this sort is, we believe, about the last place that a man would look to, namely, the births, deaths, and marriages; and it was not until the sensation had somewhat subsided, and Tommy White was talking of beating up the General’s quarter in Bury Street, to hear what it was, that his inseparable—that “nasty covetous body Cuddy Flintoff,” who had been plodding very perseveringly on the line, at length hit off what astonished him as much as we have no doubt it will the reader, being neither more nor less than the following very quiet announcement at the end of the list of marriages:—

“This morning, at St. Barnabas, by the Rev. Dr. Duff, the Right Hon. The Earl of Ladythorne, to Emma, widow of the late Wm. Pringle, Esq.”

The Earl of Ladythorne married to Mrs. Pringle! Well done our fair friend of the frontispiece! The pure white camellias are succeeded by a coronet! The borrowed velvet dress replaced by anything she likes to own. Who would have thought it!

But wonders will never cease; for on this eventful day

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Mr. George Gallon was seen driving the Countess's old coach companion, Mrs. Margerum, from Cockthorpe Church, with long white rosettes flying at Tippy Tom's head, and installing her mistress of the Rose and Crown, at the cross roads; thus showing that truth is stranger than fiction. "George," we may add, has now taken the Flying Childers Inn at Eversley Green, where he purposed extending his "Turf" operations, and we make no doubt will be heard of hereafter.

Of our other fair friends we must say a few parting words on taking a reluctant farewell.

Though Miss Clara, now Lady Mainchance, is not quite so good a housekeeper as Sir Moses could have wished, she is nevertheless extremely ornamental at the head of his table; and though she has perhaps rather exceeded with Gillow, the Major promises to make it all right by his superior management of the property. Mr. Mordecai Nathan has been supplanted by our master of "haryers," who has taken a drainage loan, and promises to set the water-works playing at Pangburn Park, just as he did at Yammerton Grange. He means to have a day a week there with his "haryers," which, he says, is the best way of seeing a country.

Miss de Glancey has revised Barley Hill Hall, for which place his Highness now appears in Burke's "Landed Gentry" very considerably; and though she has not been to Gillow, she has got the plate out of the drawing-room, and made things very smart. She keeps John in excellent order, and rides his grey horse admirably. Blurkins says "the grey mare is the better horse," but that is no business of ours.

Of all the brides, perhaps, Miss Flora got the best set down; for the Woolpack's house was capitally furnished, and he is far happier driving his pretty wife about the country with a pair of pye-bald ponies, making calls, than in risking his neck across country with hounds—or rather after them.

Of all our beauties, and thanks to Leech we have dealt in nothing else, Miss Harriet alone remains unsettled with her two strings to her bow—fine Billy and Rowley Abingdon; though which is to be the happy man remains to be seen.



THE GREY MARE IS THE BETTER HORSE.

ASK MAMMA.

We confess we incline to think that the Countess will be too many for the Yammertons ; but if she is, there is no great harm done ; for Harriet is very young, and the Owl is a safe card in the country, where men are more faithful than they are in the towns. Indeed, fine Billy is almost too young to know his own mind, and marrying now would only perhaps involve the old difficulty hereafter of father and son wanting top boots at the same time, supposing our friend to accomplish the difficult art of sitting at the Jumps.

So let us leave our hero open. And as we have only aimed at nothing but the natural throughout, we will finish by proposing a toast that will include as well the mated and the single of our story, as the mated and the single all the world over, namely, the old and popular one of “The single married, and the married happy !” drank with three times three and one cheer more !” HOO-RAY !

THE END.

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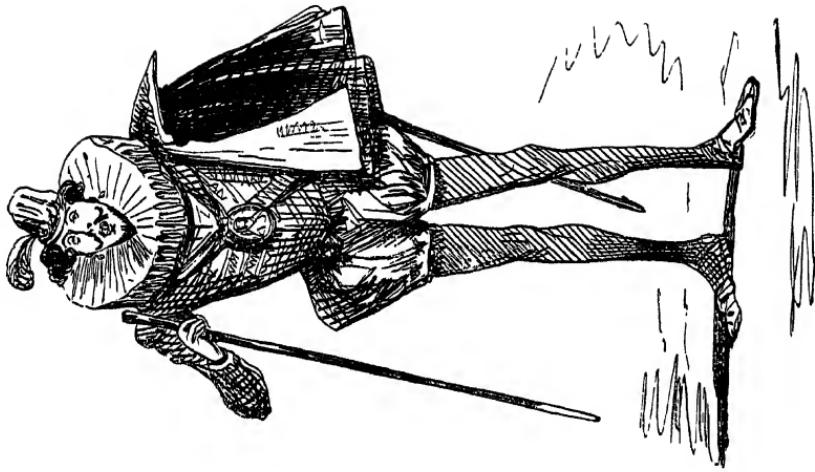


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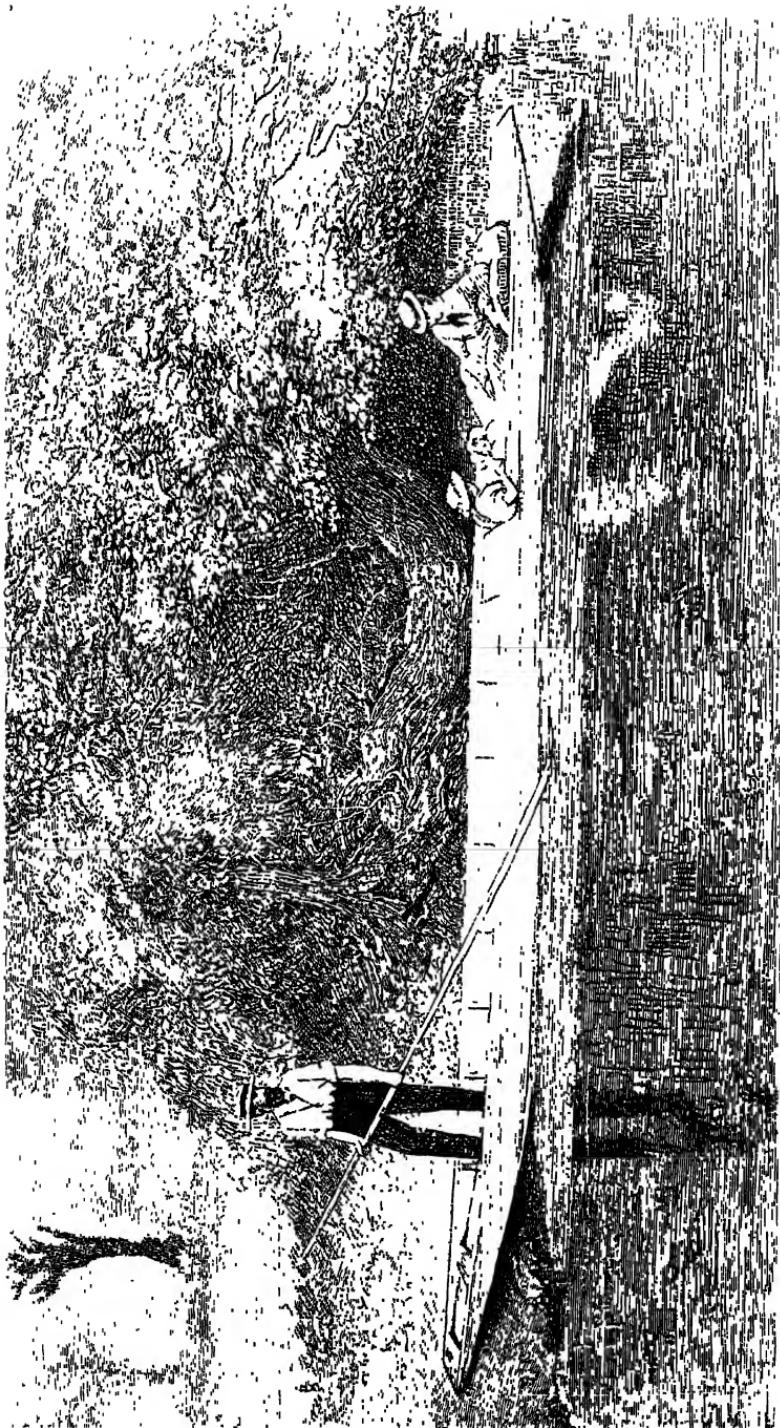
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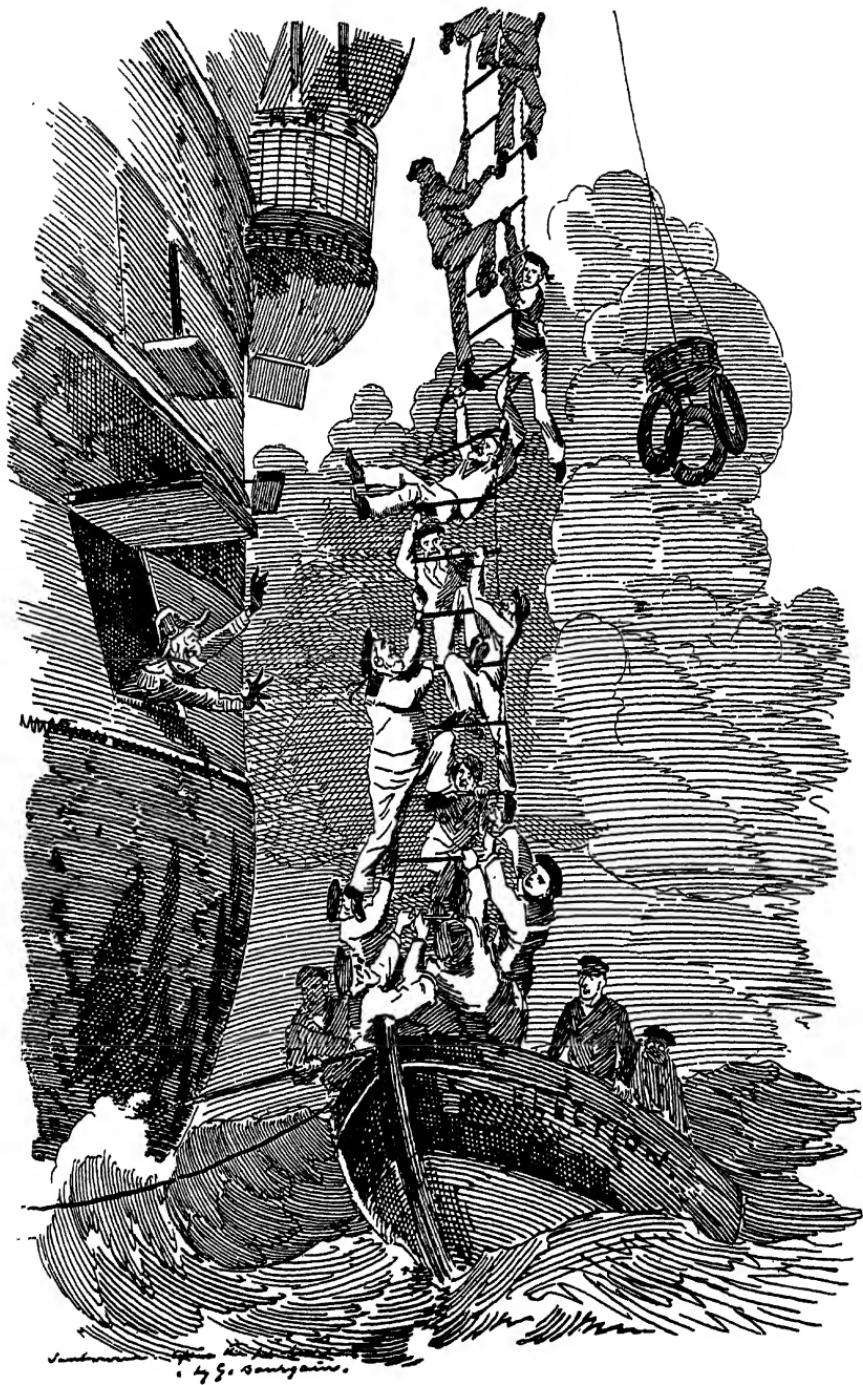
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Then take thy bond, take thou thy pound of flesh ;
 But, in the cutting it, if thou dost shed
 One drop of Christian blood, thy lands and goods
 Are, by the laws of Venice, confiscate
 Unto the state of Venice.

Gra. O upright judge !—*Mark,* Jew 1 — O learned judge !

Sky. Is that the law ?

Por. Thyself shall see the act :
 For, as thou urg'st justice, be assured
 Thou shall have justice, more than thou desirest.

Gra. O learned judge ! — *Mark,* Jew ; — a learned judge !

Sky. I take this offer then,—pay the bond thrice,

And let the Christian go.

Bass. Soft. Here is the money.
Por. The Jew shall have all justice ; — soft ; — no haste ; —

He shall have nothing but the penalty.
Gra. O Jew ! an upright judge, a learned judge !

Por. Therefore, prepare thee to cut off the flesh.

Shed thou no blood, nor cut thou less, nor more,
 But just a pound of flesh : if thou tak'st more,
 Or less, than a just pound, — be it but so much
 As makes it light, or heavy, in the substance,
 Or the division of the twentieth part
 Of one poor scruple, —nay, if the scale do turn
 But in the estimation of a hair, —

Thou diest, and all thy goods are confiscate.
Gra. A second Daniel, a Daniel, Jew 1
 Now, infidel, I have thee on the hip.

Por. Why doth the Jew pause ? take thy forfeit.

Sky. Give me my principal, and let me go.

Bass. I have it ready for thee ; here it is.

Por. He hath refused it in the open court ;
 He shall have merely justice, and his bond.

Gra. A Daniel, still say I ; a second Daniel ! — I thank thee, Jew, for teaching me that word.

Sky. Shall I not have barely my principal ?
Por. Thou shalt have nothing but the forfeit,

To be so taken at thy peril, Jew.

Sky. Why, then the devil give him good of it !
Por. I'll stay no longer question. Tarry, Jew ;

The law hath yet another hold on you,
 It is enacted in the laws of Venice, —

That by direct or indirect attempts
 If it be proved against an alien,

He seek the life of any citizen,
 The party against the which he doth contrive

Shall seize one half his goods ; the other half
 Comes to the privy coffer of the state ;

And the offender's life lies in the mercy
 Of the duke only, against all other voice.

In which predicament, I say, thou stand'st ;
 For it appears by manifest proceeding,

That, indirectly, and directly too,
 Thou hast contrived against the very life

Of the defendant ; and then hast incur'd
 The danger formerly by me rehearsed.
 Down, therefore, and beg mercy of the duke.

Gra. Beg that thou mayst have leave to hang

thyself :

And yet, thy wealth being forfeit to the state,

Thou hast not left the value of a cord ;

G

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GLOSSARY.

Scarments—bedded hair, like *life in excrements*.

The word *excrement* was a general term for anything growing out of the body, as the hair or nails.

Eyases, nestlings. An *eyas* is a young unfledged hawk, just taken from the nest.

Fantasy, imagination, fancy.

Rardals, cumbersome or inconvenient burdens,

Fay, faith. Possibly from the French *foi*.
For and a shrouding sheet, and also a shrouding sheet.

Fordes, endes, destroys, ruins.
Fronding, friendliness, friendship, favour.

Fast, to become mouldy or frosty, to smell ill.
Gentry, courtesy, good breeding, politeness.

Gib, a tom-cat.

Gales, red. A term in heraldry.

Handsaw—*know a hanzy from a handsaw*. The word "handsaw" is a corruption of *heron-staw*, a provincial term for a heron.

Hebenon, possibly intended for *herbenet*.

Hent—*know thou a more horrid hent*, i.e. be reserved for a more dreadful occasion.

Hic et ubique, here and everywhere.

Hoodman-blind, the game of blind-man's buff.

Hagger-mugger, clandestinely, by stealth.

Impitons, uncheked, without pity, merciless.

Impone, laid down as a wager.

In few, in a few words, in brief.

John-a-dreams, a sleepy, middle-headed fellow.

Jump, just, exactly, in the nick of time. A familiar term with this significance in Shakespeare's days.

Keep—*where they keep*, i.e. what places they frequent.

Kibe, a chiblain.

Lets, hinders, prevents, impedes.

Liberal shepherds, free-spoken, licentious sheep-herds. An obsolete meaning of the word *liberal*.

GLOSSARY.

Limed soul, i.e. caught as with bird-lime.

Last, a boundary or limit.

Leggots, an old game, which consisted in fixing a stake in the ground and pitching small pieces of wood at it.

Long live the King! The watchword of the night.

Mazzard, the head, the skull.

Merchy—passes it merely, i.e. absolutely.

Misching mallecho, Skulking mischief.

Mitch, moist, shedding tears.

Mobled, muffled or wrapped up, veiled.

Moist star, the moon.

Mutine, mutineers.

Napkin—take my napkin, i.e. my handkerchief.

Native to, connected by nature with.

Observuans, serious, as at funeral obsequies.

Occurrents, occurrences, current incidents or events.

Paddock, a toad. A diminutive of the Anglo-Saxon *feaf*, a toad.

Painted word, i.e. disguised word.

Peacock, a peacock.

Parley, a conference with an opponent.

Perdy, an exclamation. A contraction from the French *far Dieu!*

Polacks, Poles, natives of Poland.

Porcupine, porcupine. An obsolete form of the word.

Provencal roses on my razed shoes, i.e. rosettes in the shape of Provence or damask roses on shoes, which according to the fashion of the period were slashed or streaked in patterns.

Quiddities, quiddities, subtleties in law or in common talk.

Quilletts, nice points or quibbles.

Quoted, observed, noted, scanned.

Rock, a mass of clouds.

Recorder. A recorder was a kind of flageolet.

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